THE ®

saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

No 35

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

IN THIS ISSUE

RUFUS KING

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

RICHARD DEMING

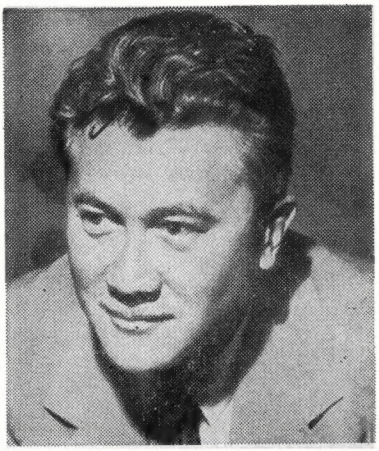
WENZELL BROWN

STUART PALMER

The Jolly Undertaker

NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



All readers of this Magazine, aside from the good taste, superb discrimination, and luminiferous intelligence which they display, and all the noble virtues which come naturally to such superior types, have one added quality in common which especially endears them to me: they are self-confessed apostates from the widespread conspiracy to chisel a few more chips from the fundamentally limited rewards which a writer's talent can earn.

For there are not yet, to my knowledge, any lending libraries for magazines; and therefore the reader, unless he stole his copy, presumably bought and paid for it, or at least came by it within the normal limits of circulation and passing-along between friends and acquaintances which all good reading matter must expect.

I have framed and hanging above my desk a treasured newspaper cartoon by Beck, showing one of those typical women at one of those typical cocktail parties saying to a cringing guest, with whom I could so easily identify myself on so many occasions: "I can't wait to read your new book. How soon will it be in the public library?"

I'm sure it has never occurred to 99% of the bird-brains so accurately personified that an author is not necessarily independently wealthy, is not subsidized by any Government bounty, and is paid strictly according to what he sells, at the rate of so much per copy on each book. (In a magazine, according to his estimated power to attract buyers.) Since the major proportion of the cost of a book (or magazine) goes to the physical production cost, printing, paper, binding, etc.—which in turn are mainly governed by the wage scale of workers whose unions protect them better than writers know how to protect themselves—these royalties run from 10% of the published price for beginners up to a maximum of 20% for big solid sellers which is exceeded only by the acknowledged colossi. So that even an established author may be lucky to realize 90 cents a copy on a monumental hard-cover book.

Libraries, on the other hand, are allowed to buy at wholesale discounts which run over 40%. Such a book, then, by a very popular author, can cost them less than $3. They are then free to rent it out to 100 readers or more, at so much a day; but the author will never see any more than his maximum 90 cents—or less than one cent per reader.

Long ago, organizations of musicians and song-writers put a stop to such exploitation so effectively that something comes to them every time their composition or recording is played. For more than 20 years I have been yelling for similar action by authors, but they could never get together on it. Which only proves, I guess, that we are a pretty stupid lot.

Erle Stanley Gardner

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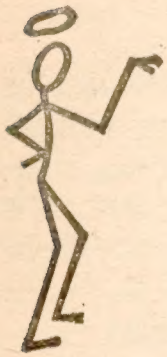

The Jolly Undertaker 3
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Riddle of the Blueblood Murders 23
by STUART PALMER

The Case of the Muted Violin 49
by RUFUS KING

The Saint: Instructions to Writers 64
by HARRY W. JUNKIN and ROBERT S. BAKER

The Gentle Murderer 68
by PHILIP KETCHUM

Homicide, Inc. 78
by RICHARD DEMING

Strange Ransom 101
by WENZELL BROWN

What's New in Crime 107
by STEFAN SANTESSON

Mrs. Block Contributes 113
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

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the jolly undertaker

by . . . Leslie Charteris

A playground can be next door to a cemetery...

"Sometimes," Simon Templar pronounced once, "I think that critics make far too much fuss about the use of coincidence in detective stories. In real life, mysteries are solved by coincidence at least half the time—because some chance witness happened to notice and remember something, or the criminal accidentally lost a button at the scene. An alibi goes blooey because an unpredictable fire stops the schemer getting back to his apartment in time for the phone call he's arranged to answer. And how many plays and movies have you seen where the perfect crime was all laid out at the start, and you sat happily on the edge of your seat waiting for the inevitable coincidence to foul it up—the incalculable old lady who comes looking for her wandering Fido, or the power failure that stops the electric clock that should have fired the bomb? The plain truth is that without some sort of fluke there'd usually be no story or no suspense. Coincidences happen to everyone, but they're only b r a n d e d as far-fetched when somebody does something with one."

One such coincidence which he might have been recalling

SIMON TEMPLAR HAD NO OBJECTION TO ANYONE HAVING FUN, BUT SOME THINGS WERE INCONGRUOUS ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM INQUISITIVE.

was not really extravagant at all, reduced to its prime essentials, which consisted of

A: reading about, and being mildly intrigued by, a minor offense committed against an individual of no obvious importance and certainly unknown to him; and

B. having that victim pointed out to him less than 48 hours later, before he had time to forget the association.

That is, if you exclude the third factor, that such coincidences seemed to happen to the Saint with exceptional frequency. But modern insurance studies have revealed that it is not purely accidental that some people have more accidents than others, and can be properly called "accident-prone". In the same way, Simon Templar seemed to attract interesting coincidences, perhaps because he made better use of them than ordinary people. This, therefore, on the best actuarial authority, should not even be called a coincidence.

The first ingredient, then, was an item in a Palm Beach, Florida, newspaper reporting that a Funeral Home in Lake Worth operated by an undertaker with the rather delightful name of Aloysius Prend had been broken into during the night, but appeared to have rewarded the robbers with no more than $7.18 and some postage stamps, the contents of a petty cash box in an office drawer.

"Now, what would give any burglar the idea of cracking an undertaker's shop?" Simon apostrophized the counter girl in the coffee shop where he was eating breakfast.

"Those guys 've got more money than anybody," she said darkly. "Inflation, depression, recession, whatever, people keep dying just the same. There's one business can always be sure of customers."

"And the worse a depression gets, the more it might boom, with more people committing suicide," Simon admitted, following her cheerful trend of thought. "But no matter how fast the bodies roll in, an undertaker doesn't normally ring up cash sales like a supermarket. He presents a nice consolidated bill for his assorted services, which is pretty certain to be big enough to be paid by check. So why should anyone expect to find any more in his desk than small change?"

"Could be they were looking for gold teeth in the stiffs."

Simon found himself liking her more every minute, but he had to point out: "It says here, there was no other damage except the window they broke to get in."

"I bet he's got plenty of it socked away, anyhow," she said, reverting to her original thesis. "You only got to walk around Lake Worth and see 'em totter-

ing about the shuffleboard courts or sitting in those everlasting auction rooms. It should make an undertaker feel like Moses with a claim staked in the Promised Land. Everyone 90 years old, and just waiting to keel over till maybe they're driving a car and can take someone else with them."

"Honestly, I'm disgustingly healthy. And I can still lick all my grandchildren."

"Oh, I can see that. I just wish I saw more fellows around here like you."

She was a comely wench, and she had that look in her eye, but he already had a fairly promising social calendar for that visit, and he decided not to complicate it with this additional prospect, at least for the present.

The established playgrounds of the spoiled sophisticates, socially registered or columnist-created, are forced to struggle with one perennial blight: a dearth of eligible playboys. This may be because the widows and divorcees are too durable, or the influx of their would-be successors too torrential; or because the men who have yet to earn their own wherewithal are still tied to their jobs and projects in less glamorous but more lucrative centers, or those who inherited it have been decimated by a preference for mixed drinks and/or mixed genders; there is a whole rubric of hypotheses which this chronicler may examine at some other time. The fact remains that in such places any unattached male with reasonable manners, charm, alcoholic tolerance, stamina, and affinity for empty chatter, can be assured of enough invitations to guarantee him his choice of gastritis or cirrhosis, or both; and what is so descriptively called the Florida Gold Coast is no exception.

Simon Templar had never made any systematic effort to crash this exclusively dubious society, but there were times when it amused him to be a fringe free-loader, and he had not fled from the northern blizzards to the subtropical sunshine to enjoy himself like a hermit. He shared any intelligent man's disdain for cocktail parties, in principle; but he knew no easier way for a comparative stranger in town to make a lot of assorted acquaintances quickly.

"This is my house guest, Betty Winchester," said his hostess.

"How do you do," murmured the Saint, like anyone else.

"You're going to take her to dinner," his hostess informed him regally; then she saw some more guests arriving. "Oh, excuse me—you tell him about it, Betty."

The girl was actually blushing—an olde-worlde phenomenon which Simon found quite exotic.

"You don't really have to, of

course," she assured him. "She's worried because she has to leave me tonight—an emergency meeting of some charity committee she's on—and she thinks it's dreadful to have to abandon me to myself. Please don't think any more about it."

She had black hair and very large hazel eyes in a face that was pert and appealing now, and within the next seven years would decide whether to be stodgy or sensual or sulky, just as her nubile figure would become voluptuous or gross. But at that moment Simon was not shopping for futures. He estimated her age at a barely possible 22.

"But I'd like to think about it," he said. "I didn't have any better ideas. Unless you did?"

"No. I haven't been going out much. I came down here to stay with my uncle, who'd been very sick, and when he died these nice people insisted that I move in with them till after the funeral."

"Had you known them before?" he asked. The usual small talk.

"I went to high school with their daughter, and we still see each other sometimes."

"Where do you live, then?"

"In New York. And she's married and living in Philadelphia. Do you live here?"

"No. I'm just another tourist, too . . . When was this funeral?"

"Yesterday."

"I'm sorry. But I take it you are not in total mourning."

"Oh, no. Although my cousin and I were his only last relatives. But we weren't really so close to him, all the same. And I don't think it would do him any good now if I went around being tragic for months, would it?"

"With all due respect to Uncle, I agree," Simon said. "So about this dinner— is there anything special you feel an appetite for?"

She thought.

"Only one thing I haven't been able to get, at least not the way I remember them: stone crabs! We used to go to a place, Joe's, right at the south end of Miami Beach—"

"That's a lot longer haul than it used to be, since this coast got practically built up all the way. But I discovered another place last season, a bit closer, on the Seventy-ninth Street Causeway, where the claws are just as luscious and sometimes even bigger." He consulted his watch. "I could get you there in not much more than an hour on the Parkway, and if you had one more drink before we took off you'd hardly know you'd missed anything. That is, unless there's something about this brawl that we mustn't miss?"

The answer was that they dined sumptuously at Nick & Arthur's, stifling for temporary logistic reasons the nostalgic loyalty to Joe's, and sentimentally comparing the size and

succulence of the specimens served by both establishments.

"Anyway," Simon concluded, "they are Florida's unique and wonderful contribution to the hungry tummy. And what more could Lucullus ask?"

She didn't try to answer that, most probably having never heard of Lucullus, but she happily finished everything that could be put on her plate, and had some coconut cream pie after it while he finished the bottle of Deinhard Steinwein '59 with which they had launched those supreme crustaceans. After which it ultimately and inevitably came to a question of what they should do next.

Since the Saint's adventures nearly always seem to get dated by something or other, it may as well be stated right away that this happened during the epoch when a so-called dance called the Twist had spread like an epidemic from a place called the Peppermint Lounge in New York where it first broke out, across the United States and even beyond the seas; and on countless nightclub floors devotees who had hitherto seemed at least superficially rational were disjointing vertebrae and spraining knees in frenzied attempts to imitate the writhings of an inexpert Fijian fire-walker trying to help himself across the coals by holding on to a live wire.

As they came out of the restaurant, Simon noticed that they were next door to a new manifestation which had moved in since the last time he had been there: an establishment which proclaimed itself, in splendid neon, to be "New York's Peppermint Lounge." Discounting any fantastic possibility that the original New York incubator of the current mania had physically uprooted itself and followed its vacationing habitues to Miami Beach, it seemed as if this must at least be an authorized and authentic branch of the mother lodge; and he was reminded of a shocking deficiency in his spectrum of experience.

"Do you know, Betty," he said, "that you are out tonight with not just a square, but a four-dimensional cube? I still haven't seen a Twist session in full swing. Would you chaperone me in there for just long enough to see what it's all about?"

"That's the last thing I'd have expected you to suggest," she said respectfully. "Let's try it."

It was still early enough for the place to be packed only halfway to suffocation, but they were able to find one stool to share at the bar while they waited for a table which Simon felt cynically prepared to decline if and when it was finally offered. Meanwhile he absorbed the scene which he had come in to see, endeavoring in what he felt must have been a rectangular way to fathom the motivations of the customers who wriggled

and twitched to a simple monotonous beat like a h o r d e of frenetic d e r v i s h e s freshly sprinkled with itching powder.

"Well?" she teased at last. "Don't you want to try it?"

"Thank you," s i g h e d the Saint. "But I'm oldfashioned. Dancing went out for me when it stopped being an excuse to snuggle a girl up close and whisper wicked suggestions in her ear with a h e l p f u l background of s e d u c t i v e music. These arm's-length athletics — the jitterbug, the rumba, and now this — seem like an awful waste of energy and opportunity."

"You sound as if you had a one-track mind," she said; but she smiled.

"Doesn't everyone, any more? In my young days, they did . . ."

Suddenly she was no longer listening. She was staring into the quivering mob with a fixity that seemed scarcely justified by any of their individual contortions. Her hand fell on his arm.

"Look — over there! The elderly man in the Madras jacket, with the platinum babe in the red sweater."

Simon found it easier to track the assigned target through the babe, who stood out not only because of the color of her sweater but by reason of what filled it. Even at his most chivalrous, he could not take issue with the "Babe" description, which fitted not only the artificial whiteness of the hair but the blend of hardness and looseness in the face. If she was not the kind of company available to any lonesome visitor for a phone call and a fee, she had certainly made a democratic e f f o r t to look like it.

Her partner, who was identifiable mainly because she looked and shook in his direction more than in any other, was a man of entirely average size with rimless glasses and insufficient strands of gray hair meticulously plastered over the top of his head in a laborious but absurdly vain attempt to disguise the fact that there was no supporting growth underneath them. His other features somewhat resembled those of a puritanical rabbit, with a reservation that at that moment it was apparently playing truant. Simon guessed him to be no older than 50, and reflected sadly that the adjective "elderly" was as descriptive of the person who used it as of the person it was applied to.

"A n y b o d y you know?" he asked.

"It's Mr. Prend — the undertaker who handled my uncle's funeral!"

"Not Aloysius?"

"Yes. Did you ever hear of such a name?"

He decided that it was hardly worth giving her a discourse on St. Aloysius Gonzaga of Castiglione, who died of the plague in Rome in 1591 at the tender

age of 23, and was designated the patron saint of young people; but Mr. Aloysius Prend was certainly doing credit to his name in the youthful if untrained exuberance with which he quivered and cavorted in uninhibited emulation of his tarty companion.

"After all," Simon reasoned at length, "I suppose even undertakers have to relax sometimes. He wouldn't dare be seen looking anything but solemn and mournful around Lake Worth, so he has to go out of town to let off steam. And it's a million to one that none of his prospective customers would catch him in a place like this."

"And that babe he's with!"

"I expect he has to take what he can get. It wouldn't be too easy for him to date a nice home-town gal who knew what business he was in. Be charitable, and try not to let him see you. It'd only ruin his evening."

"It seems almost indecent," she persisted. "You'd think he was celebrating something. And his place was burgled only the other night. Who on earth would do a thing like that?"

"Most likely some juvenile delinquents on a dare," said the Saint. "And he's celebrating because they didn't drink up his expensive embalming fluid. Now could you stand it if we moved on to some joint with a floor show more suitable for my hardening arteries?"

He was able to get her out before Mr. Prend seemed to have noticed her; but his flippant dismissal of the subject of Mr. Prend's incongruous relaxation was activated only by a reluctance to argue about it with an interlocutor who was not likely to contribute any more to his peculiar sensitivities.

But the truth was that he had become intensely interested in Mr. Aloysius Prend.

The Saint had an apperception of oddities of behavior and circumstance like the reaction of a musician to a false note. It was nothing that could be taught or acquired, or explained to anyone whose inner hearing was not so finely tuned. Nor was he governed by the sterile assumption that anything unusual or unconventional must have some reprehensible connection; far from it. But he conceded that all crime is a deviation from the current norm, and it was his instinct for the kind of abnormality most likely to be linked with skullduggery in the process of cooking-up or concealment that had led him into more strange situations perhaps than any other single factor in the complex equation of his life.

During the next few hours, he tried to fill in a picture of the uncle whose mortal disposition had accidentally enabled Betty Winchester to discover the incongruous other side of Mr. Prend.

Ernest Cardman, he learned by assembling and coordinating

a great variety of disorganized and personalized information which he coaxed from her as innocuously as possible, as the elder brother of two sisters who had selfishly flipped off and got married before he felt qualified for such a plunge, had been left holding the bag (if we may be excused the expression in this context) and had been forced to become the comforter, counsellor, and companion of their widowed mother, who had lingered through manifold ailments until she was well over 80. By that time, Uncle Ernest had either become habituated to his way of life or had decided that he liked it, for he took no advantage of his belated liberation. He went on living in the same modest beach house on South Ocean Boulevard down towards Lake Worth, although the land it stood on could by then have been sold to a hotel or motel for five times the value of the building, with no friends and no apparent ambition to make any, poring endlessly over the charts and analyses supplied by a dozen or more stock market advisory services to which he subscribed, which were his only recreation and his only reading except for the world news which had to be studied for its potential reflection in the markets.

He punctiliously invited Betty and her cousin, the son of his other sister, to visit him for a week each year during the season, but made no effort to give them entertainment and seemed to derive nothing from their company except the relief they volunteered him from his household chores. He still did his own shopping, cooking, and housekeeping, as he had done it for his mother, who in her later years became so temperamental and exacting that no paid servant would stay with her. That was, until a couple of years ago, when his own health betrayed him and he had been obliged to hire a former hospital nurse who was willing to double as housekeeper to take care of him.

"She's quite a jewel—not that she doesn't know it," was the description of Mrs. Velma Yanstead. "The motherly sort, even though she's a good deal younger than Uncle Ernest. But I suppose that was just what he wanted."

At any rate, Mrs. Yanstead had stayed on, even after he made a partial recovery from the "intestinal flu" which had brought her in, and cared for him solicitously through the increasingly frequent gastric upsets which he became prone to, until the final acute attack to which he succumbed.

"I guess you could qualify for the Freud Trophy," Simon concurred gravely, and then hastily explained — "that's a sort of head-shrinkers' Oscar. He should have been grateful to find another apron-string."

"He was," Betty said, so bit-

terly that he now understood the tinge of spite that had faintly d i s c o l o r e d her previous praise. "He left her practically everything!"

"He did?"

"Well, he left me and my cousin two thousand d o l l a r s each, like showing he hadn't forgotten us. But she got the house and all the rest."

"And there was a lot more?"

"His attorney said he had stocks worth about a quarter of a million."

Ernest C a r d m a n's single-minded study of the oscillations of Wall Street had not been unprofitable. Yet with perhaps typical parsimony, he had saved himself a legal fee by disposing of that considerable estate in a simple one-page will written in his own crabbed and s h a k y hand. As a holograph will, it required no witnesses, and had been sent by ordinary mail to his attorney, who had been out of town at the time and who had not even seen it until he returned the day after his client died.

"Was it a shock to you?"

"Was it! We had no idea he was so well off, but still he'd always let us understand t h a t whatever there was would come to us. In fact, I can remember him saying he wouldn't even waste his time making a will at all, because as his next-of-kin we'd automatically inherit anyhow. And all he'd done before that was leave a letter with his attorney willing his body to the University of Miami medical school. Henry — my cousin — was fit to be tied. He was staying with Uncle Ernest before I came down, and he never got any kind of idea what was cooking. He says we ought to contest the will."

The phantom electric needles of unfocused intuition tried to stitch their way up the Saint's spine.

"I believe there is something called 'u n d u e influence'," he hazarded.

"So Henry says. But I must admit, I never saw her get out of line when I was there. She was always sweet."

"Doesn't Henry think it was forged, then?"

"He's talked about that too. But Velma said she wished it could be checked by a handwriting expert. I couldn't help feeling sorry for her, in a way."

Most of this was not actually a connected conversation, as it appears — which would have been difficult in some of the places and situations they were in — but it is so presented to spare the reader all the irrelevant i n t e r r u ptions. And the Saint has his own way of teasing out information over a period of time, without seeming to cross-examine as it might sound from nothing but the relevant exchanges.

They were driving unhurriedly back to Palm Beach on the coast road before he brought

the topic casually back to the background of her cousin.

"Was Henry at the party tonight? I don't remember meeting him."

"No. He isn't staying there. He moved out to a motel after the will was read, though Velma did say he was welcome to stay. I expect he had some other date — he'd like to be a playboy, but he can't often afford it."

"And now at least he's got two thousand to play with. What does he do for money between legacies?"

"He has a job in an advertising agency."

"And thinks he should be an account executive — with a fat expense account?"

"He'd like to be."

Simon looked at her again from another angle.

"And what about you, Betty? What do you do in New York?"

"I'm a cosmetician," she said, and added defensively: "That doesn't mean I work in a beauty parlor. I advise people what to buy, what would do the most for them, and I probably help more men than women — about choosing those kind of gifts, I mean."

She named the Fifth Avenue department store where she performed this invaluable service, but it did not awe him out of kidding her most irreverently about the qualifications for her profession and its importance to the economy.

Nevertheless, when they got back to the mansion where she was staying, she was the one who said: "Shall I be seeing you again?"

"When are you going back to the magic mud-packs?" he asked.

"On Sunday. I can't take another week off, the way it's turned out."

"How about dinner tomorrow?" He glanced pointedly at his watch. "I mean really tomorrow, not a little later today."

"Go."

(We already warned that this incident would be bound to get dated, like all the others.)

At the door, she kissed him spontaneously on the lips, but with a swiftness that was there and gone before anything but surmise could be made of it; and he drove away with one more question raised instead of answered in his mind.

In the morning, however, he was out at a very reasonably early hour, heading for the address of the late Ernest Cardman, which he located with no trouble in the phone book — he had interrogated Betty Winchester quite enough not to want to have overloaded his inquisition with that last detail.

As he had been told, it was a comparatively modest house for its prime location; and when his ring on the bell was answered he found Mrs. Velma Yanstead no less modest, in a neck-high housecoat of some starchy

material which was so studiously respectable that it proclaimed almost aggressively that her virtue mattered more to her than her comfort. And yet, somewhat paradoxically, that did not make her forbidding. She was fat and forty and heartily uncomplicated.

"I'm from the *Miami Guardian*," he said, with conscienceless aplomb. "As you know, we have a Palm Beach section in our Sunday edition, and of course we'll have to print something about Mr. Cardman and his will. Is there anything you'd like to say about it for publication?"

"Well, really!" She was neither coy nor antagonistic, but just diffident enough to be likeable. "I'd no idea that would be news."

"A quarter of a million dollars is still news, Mrs. Yanstead, even in these inflated times. May I come in for a few minutes?"

The living-room was like a million middle-class Florida living-rooms, undistinguished by planned interior decoration or obtrusive eccentricity. It was furnished with what can best be described as furniture—more or less functional things with legs, arms, seats, or flat surfaces. The general tone, especially of the bric-a-brac, perhaps had a grandmotherly or old-maidish tinge which Mr. Cardman had clearly had no solitary urge to change; but it was not strenuously slanted towards the antique, and it certainly did not suggest wealth or extravagance.

"You sound rather like him," Mrs. Yanstead said amiably. "Always talking about inflation, he was, and twenty-five-cent dollars and recessions and I don't know what else. I never argued with him—that was his hobby, and it was none of my business."

"You had no idea how wealthy he was?"

"I never thought about it. I knew he must 've been fairly comfortably off, but he didn't spend as if he had it to throw away."

"You weren't in his confidence at all personally?"

The question could hardly have been phrased more perfectly, without the slightest hint at which she could have taken offense, but open to her to answer as fully as she might be inclined.

"He was just like any other patient; but I've always got on well with my patients." She stated it as a matter of professional pride warmed by human satisfaction. "You can't do them much good if you don't get on with them. I wasn't like a servant, of course—we played cribbage and watched television together, and everything like that. But there was nothing romantic about it."

"Then the will was as much a surprise to you as to anyone?"

"You could 've knocked me

down with a feather."

Simon scribbled solemnly on the back of an envelope, like a stage reporter, recording the brilliant cliche for quotation, in case he forgot it.

He changed the subject for a moment:

"What exactly did Mr. Cardman die of?"

"Acute gastro-enteritis. He'd suffered a lot with it, off and on, ever since he got that intestinal virus that had me brought in."

"There wasn't anything the doctor could do?"

"He had prescriptions. But I suppose his insides were damaged more than they could repair, at his age. And he was always trying out diets on his own, or dosing himself with medicines and health syrups that he saw advertised. I think they did him more harm than good. I used to get quite cross with Mr. Otterly for encouraging him."

The Saint was briefly puzzled.

"Mr. Otterly?"

"His nephew."

"Oh, yes. There's a niece, too, isn't there?"

"Miss Winchester. A pretty girl, and I think she was Mr. Cardman's favorite. But Mr. Otterly was naughty, always encouraging him by sending him things from New York—seaweed pills and grass powder and I don't know what else. Just trying to make up to his uncle, I know, but it was no help."

"You were always on good terms with both of them—I mean, the nephew and niece?"

"I thought so."

"So you thought they'd be understanding about being sort of disinherited in your favor?"

This time perhaps he was not quite subtle enough, for he struck a spark from her deep-set black eyes before the plump wrinkles creased around them again.

"I didn't feel badly at first," she said. "Until Mr. Otterly turned rather nasty—have you seen him?"

"No."

"Well, he said some very nasty things, about me taking advantage of his uncle. So then I stopped feeling sorry for him. I thought, if he's going to be a bad sport, because he didn't manage to cut out his cousin with those pills and things that he kept working on Mr. Cardman with, then why should I get in a family battle? I thought Mr. Cardman made up his own mind, and if this is what he wanted I've got a right to take it, and bless him."

"Do you have a picture of him?"

Mrs. Yanstead looked around vaguely. There were a few framed photographs on walls and ledges; but the Saint's surreptitiously wandering glances had identified most of them as plates from a sentimental biography of a woman who could only have been Mr. Cardman's

mother, a recurrent face from an old misty-edged sepia vignette of a demure young girl to a modern skilfully-retouched portrait of a prim, old matriarch. Mr. Cardman's inclusion in a group with his sisters, gathered around her in their self-consciously angelic adolescence, was not what Simon had in mind; but Mrs. Yanstead's obliging exploration discovered a very contemporary snapshot tucked into one corner of phonus-period velvet frame.

"He was never one to have his picture taken," she said, "but this is one that Miss Winchester took right after she came down this season."

It was the typical box-camera enlargement, obviously taken against one side of the house, with Mrs. Yanstead and Mr. Cardman standing awkwardly side by side (but at a discreet distance) and both looking straight into the lens and grinning in the pointless mechanical way beloved of the amateur artists who are the bread and butter of the photographic-supply industry; but partly on that account it had the virtue of presenting a facial facsimile that was recognizable in the same brutal way that a passport photo or a prison mug shot may be recognizable. It showed Mr. Cardman with a predatory nose but a weak chin, a cocky but frail figure beside the foster-mother of his senility, who seemed to make an earthly honest effort to hold back and avoid eclipsing him with her superior bulk and vitality.

"May I borrow this?" Simon asked. "It won't be damaged, and I'll send it back in a day or two."

"I suppose so."

"One other thing," he said as he was leaving: "where can I find Mr. Otterly?"

"He went to the Tradewind—that's the first motel you come to down the road. I expect he'll have plenty to say about me." She pursed her lips, then shrugged and smiled again. "Well, I don't live in a glass house, so I shouldn't worry about who throws stones."

Simon drove on to the motel, and after inquiring at the office he was directed to the Terrace Snack Bar, which was beside the swimming pool, which had considerately been provided for the indulgence of guests who either found a hundred-yard walk to the beach too fatiguing or were appalled by the potential perils of the rippling ocean. There he found Cousin Henry eating an improbably early lunch, or more likely a very belated breakfast, consisting of corned beef hash and black coffee.

Henry Otterly was a broad-shouldered young man with a premature paunch bulging over the top of his Hawaiian-print shorts. His black hair was slicked down in graceful sweeps over his head and his ears, but

below that it sprouted in thin curls all over him except in the conventionally scraped facial areas, which had the dark sheen of gun-metal. He had the still red and unfinished tan of the typical tourist, and another rosy tinge in his eyeballs which some Yankee visitors acquire under the palm-trees and others bring with them from a lunch diet of dry martinis. This season he still had a certain fast and superficial charm; and in a very few years, unless he found the end of his rainbow, he could be just another slob.

He received the Saint with practised Madison-Avenue affability—a blend of pressurized brightness and defensive flexibility.

"The *Guardian*? Of course, the best newspaper in the South, I tell everybody—except people from the other papers. But are you selling space or trying to fill some?"

"Would you like to make any statement about your late uncle's will?" Simon asked.

'I'd like to make several, but not to you. I don't want to have something printed that I could be sued for."

"I suppose we could safely say that you were surprised."

"I think so. Also astounded, staggered, flabbergasted — and perhaps even incredulous."

"And if you did make a statement it might be uncomplimentary to someone?"

"It might be," Mr. Otterly said. He tugged at his lower lip with mock judiciousness. "Yes, I think you can safely say that. Very uncomplimentary. Would you like some mocha, java, or just any coffee?"

"I'm a bit farther ahead in the day," Simon said negatively. "But a Dry Sack on the rocks would go down nicely."

"Good idea." Otterly repeated the order to a waitress, adding: "And I'll have a Bloody Mary."

Simon resumed: "I can understand that you'd want to be careful, Mr. Otterly, but it's true that you're thinking of contesting the will, isn't it?"

"I've discussed it with my attorneys, yes. We're having another meeting on it this afternoon. It's in what I would call the survey stage. We turn the pros and cons loose in the pond and see what they spawn."

"Are you hoping to prove the will was forged?"

"That might be difficult. I'm not giving much away, but everyone concerned knows that my uncle had a fairly bad stroke a few years ago, and his right hand and arm never recovered completely. So it might be a bit marginal to rely on handwriting experts. On the other hand, anyone with enough motive to forge a will would be even more capable of getting the old man to write it himself."

"You mean what they call 'undue influence'?"

"That's something like the

beat of the legal jazz."

Simon circulated his drink in the glass which had been delivered to him, and sipped it appreciatively.

"Did that stroke affect Mr. Cardman anywhere besides the arm?" he inquired, without flippancy.

"Like in the head? Now you approach the cosmic. You invoke the definition that makes p o l i t ics, religion, philosophy, and low comedy. Who is nuts and who isn't? Well, I'd hate to claim that my own uncle was insane, but he'd reached an age when his mind was certainly not as sharp as it was when he was younger. There's plenty of evidence that he was eccentric, to say the least. Even Mrs. Yanstead, unless she perjures herself, will have to admit that he had to be coaxed or bullied to take his doctor's medicine, but he'd try anything he heard of from some q u a c k advertisement."

"And she says you encouraged him, sending him all kinds of health foods and herb remedies and what not."

Otterly shot him a hard stare, without a flicker of embarrassment.

"Oh, you've already talked to her." It was a statement, not a q u e s t i o n. "I don't deny it. Harmless placebos — I made sure of that. Things that I knew couldn't h u r t him, and may even have given him a few extra vitamins. I went along with the gag; and if it made him happy, what was wrong with that?"

"And since you're a relative, that couldn't be called 'undue influence' in your case," Simon said.

His tone was so impeccably neutral that for the first time Henry Otterly seemed uncertain — but whether of himself or of the Saint's intention would have been a very ticklish nuance to bet on.

"My dear sir, you're not aiming a muckraker at the American Family image? M a k i n g subversive suggestions that the affection they lavish on Rich U n c l e is magnetized by his credit rating? Don't apologize. Even if that's what you were thinking, it's obvious that I did not try too hard — even if I did commit the crime of trying to be more sympathetic than my cousin Betty. The proof is that neither of us got in the real money. We were left out in the pasture by a nag with no form at all — pardon my choice of metaphor. And we hadn't even thought she was in the running. Therefore one may legitimately wonder if the race was fixed. But in such a case one suspects the winner, not the losers. Do you excavate, gate?"

"I dig," said the Saint, but regretfully decided that it would not be in keeping with his role to complete the rhyme. "Although it's still hard for me to see how a man can be influenced into actually making a will like

that, cutting off his own family in favor of a comparative stranger. I mean, without thumbscrews, or that sort of persuasion."

Otterly waved his hands with a commanding eloquence that was somehow reminiscent of an orchestra conductor in full flourish.

"Psychology, my friend." He was genial again, as his confidence recovered and re-inflated. "That's something I understand. It's my business. Why do you smoke what you smoke, shave with whatever you use, brush your teeth with that toothpaste? Because they were sold to you. You only chose what you chose because somebody knew how to get through your resistance and make you want it. My uncle was conditioned for twenty years and more to a Mother fixation. He was a push-over for the next person who came along who could fit into that Mother-image."

"And all your psychology couldn't compete with her?"

"Does my cousin Betty look like a Mother? Only if you include the kind that you find in homes for wayward girls. Do I look like a Mother? Be careful how you answer that." Otterly grinned, and emptied his Bloody Mary. By now he was hugely pleased with himself. "You know we didn't stand a chance against a real Mother-type, if she went out to exploit it. Whether a Court will agree is another matter. So I don't think I can say any more without the risk of damaging my own case. You understand?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then goodbye." Otterly stood up, holding out his hand, pleasantly, but offensively secure in his privilege and his *savoir faire*. "Call me after the verdict, and I might have some more Pulitzer material for you."

He turned away and plunged into the pool, ungracefully but finally enough; and Simon let it go at that. The Saint was not yet prepared, for purely private satisfaction, to explode the innocuous anonymity with which he seemed to have saddled himself. But only a much more rarified objective could have controlled the temptation.

And now he had one, beyond any doubt, for he was sure that Mr. Ernest Cardman's death, though it could hardly be called untimely, had nevertheless been artificially expedited.

But cerebral certainty is not proof; and even the Saint in his most lawless days, with all his impatience with the finicky rules of legal evidence and his delight in clearing his own short cuts to justice, had always required some positive verification, satisfactory at least to him if not to all technical criteria. And nobody knew better than he that any law-abiding police agency would be still more hesitant to turn on the sirens and rush hither and

yon merely because he, Simon Templar, walked in and said he felt sure he had discovered a murder.

Luckily (and if this sounds like one more coincidence, let the statisticians make the most of it) he had a fairly direct access to the next facility he needed which for a while at least allowed him to be himself again. The Saint had friends, acquaintances, and contacts everywhere: they were a sort of human stock-in-trade, a fringe of his life which made much of the core possible. He had acquired many of them in highly improbable ways, haphazard as often as adventurous, but when it was necessary he had no compunction about calling on any of them.

He had met Julian D. Corrington, Professor Emeritus and at that time head of the Zoology Department of the University of Miami, by correspondence over a magazine article that Dr. Corrington had written about Sherlock Holmes; for Dr. Corrington, in a small part of his spare time, happened also to be one of the many distinguished intellectuals who have made a whimsical cult of studying the detective writings of Conan Doyle as minutely as a theologian analyzes the scriptures, and often with resultant discoveries which must exert as much graveyard torque on that Master as similar diversions may apply to this chronicler in due time.

A person-to-person phone call established at no cost that Dr. Corrington was still tied up with his bi-weekly Histology class, but would be in his office in the afternoon; and Simon shamelessly cheated the telephone company to the enrichment of the petroleum industry by driving down to Coral Gables and presenting himself in person after lunch, which he ate rather late but unhurriedly before heading down LeJeune Road to the University.

Directed to a room on the third floor of the Anastasia Building, on the North Campus, he found an alert good-natured man with plentiful gray hair and gray mustache, whose trim and erect figure belied the seventy years he laid claim to.

"Are you really the man I've read so much about?" he said. "I never thought I'd actually meet you in person."

They chatted for a while in generalities, until Simon felt he could broach the purpose of his call without sounding too cavalier about it.

The Professor listened to him thoughtfully, and said: "I think I should take you to see the head of the Department of Anatomy —it would be under his jurisdiction, and he knows all the law about these things. I expect you'll find you have to get a court order, or at least a formal request from the police."

"Knowing who I am, can you

see the police doing me any favors?" Simon objected. "And I haven't enough to go on to get a court order, at this moment. I doubt if I could even impress the head of your Anatomy Department. And yet this is urgent. If anything happens to that body, it'll be almost impossible to make it a murder case."

"It may be hard to locate the body even now," Corrington said. "As I understand the procedure, they try to make a cadaver anonymous as soon as possible."

"But somebody must sign a receipt for it when it's delivered," Simon argued. "Somebody must unpack it and put it wherever they keep the supplies for the dissecting rooms. This was so recent that it might still be possible to trace it — if only too much time isn't wasted."

"I suppose we can make inquiries. I can take you over there, at any rate, unofficially of course, like any personal friend I'm showing around, and you can see what answers you get."

"That'd be a step forward, anyhow. If it isn't asking too much."

"It would be amusing to be the Saint's Dr. Watson, even in such a minor way." Corrington's eyes twinkled. "And I can not be held responsible for what questions you ask the janitor, or what he chooses to tell you."

He steered the Saint briskly out to his car in the parking lot behind the building, and chauffeured him a half-dozen blocks along Riviera Drive to a building which to Simon looked reminiscent of the pre-war Coral Gables Biltmore Hotel, a sister caravanserai of Miami Beach's Roney Plaza which somehow got separately orphaned when the Coral Gables development failed to match the Beach as another southern Samarkand.

"That's what it is," Corrington told him. "And this first building we're coming to was the old servants' quarters. Now it's part of our Medical School, temporarily, until they finish the new buildings."

"How are the mighty fallen," Simon murmured, thinking also of Mr. Cardman, who despite his thriftiness, when the hotel and himself were equally in flower, would probably never have dreamed of using any entrance but the front.

The semi-basement storage room to which they were admitted by recognition of Dr. Corrington had even fewer prospects as a tourist attraction, having been converted into something like a giant filing or safe-deposit vault smelling of formaldehyde and the clammy by-products of refrigeration. The individual in charge, however, was contrastingly warm and cheerful — perhaps because, as he immediately explained, he was only temporarily replacing the regular incumbent, hospitalized for a

minor ailment, and did not think he wanted to make a career of it.

"Yeah, I remember that one, because I'm still lookin' to see where they come from," he said without hesitation. "Like kids collect stamps or car tags. This was the only one I had from Lake Worth since I been on the job. Come in only yesterday. I know exactly where I put him."

Simon said to Corrington: "Would there be any chance of getting some friendly pathologist on the faculty to take a look at it? I don't mean a regular autopsy, but enough to see if there might be *prima facie* grounds to ask for one."

"Good heavens, that would be completely out of order! I couldn't ask anyone to risk losing his job like that."

"Well, then, at least see if you can't get this body put on one side for a few days, just long enough for me to—"

"Here," said the temporary custodian of cadavers.

He had pulled out one of the oversize drawers banked along one wall, in which the pathetic but essential materials for scientific study were impersonally stored.

Simon looked in, at the naked corpse of a short flabby male in his fifties, with a round face and a snub Irish nose, and felt for a second as if the terrazza floor was falling from under him.

He finally recovered his voice.

"That isn't Cardman," he stated.

"Are you sure?" Corrington asked dubiously. "Death sometimes seems to change people—"

Simon took out the snapshot that he had borrowed from Mrs. Yanstead, and showed it.

"As much as that?"

"This is the one from Lake Worth, anyhow, said the custodian.

"Couldn't you possibly be mistaken?" insisted the Saint. "May I look in the other drawers?"

"If you think I'm an idiot," was the aggrieved retort, "help yourself. And I'll get my book and look up the record."

Simon accepted the invitation literally, and pulled open every other drawer. There was no face in any of them that could ever have been the face in the snapshot, even allowing for the maximum transfigurations of death. But the custodian returned more stubbornly affirmative than ever.

"That's the one," he said. "Come from Prend's Funeral Home in Lake Worth."

"Could it by any chance have been taken out for dissection and another body put in the same drawer since?"

"Not by any chance. There's been no cadavers taken out for two days."

Simon caught the Professor's eye and indicated with a slight motion of his head that they should leave.

Outside, he said: "I think we have got to believe him. On the other hand, I'm not mistaken either. Which leaves only one possible explanation. Cardman's body was switched for another one before the coffin was delivered here."

"In order to hide something?"

"Exactly. Because somebody was afraid that when it was taken apart in the lab, some professor or precocious student might notice that there was something wrong with it — something that didn't gibe with the assigned diagnosis. I suppose that in spite of the anonymity angle, a body would have to go to the lab with some presumed cause of death attached to it, so that the students could be warned about what was normal and what was abnormal?"

"I don't really know how they handle that here. But—"

"Anyhow, all that matters now is to prevent the trail getting any more confused. The guy in charge in there positively identifies the body he showed us as the one he received from Lake Worth. I have a picture that contradicts him. It shouldn't be any problem to decide who's right, with witnesses who knew Cardman, dental charts, maybe even fingerprints —just so long as nothing is messed up. Now, surely you can arrange somehow to get this body put on ice, so to speak, for at least twenty-four hours, till I fill in the holes that the police would pick on."

"Why don't you let me take you to the head of the Department—"

"Because it would take too long, and I'd start getting entangled in red tape, which makes me break out in a rash. And if the police clomp into this too soon, with their big boots, they could still louse it up or be too late. Just give me this much leeway, Dr. Corrington. Make sure, somehow, that nothing happens to that body. Even if I'm as wrong as anyone can be, it'll be just as useful a cadaver tomorrow. And what on earth could you be accused of if you merely helped to keep it untouched for one day?"

The Professor Emeritus cogitated this carefully and profoundly, and finally came up with a grin that was as young as the season.

"They're going to retire me as it is," he said. "Now they'll have to accuse me of being a juvenile delinquent."

When Simon Templar got back to Palm Beach, it was late enough for the telephone to report no reply from Mr. Preud's Funeral Home (as he found it was actually listed) or from Ernest Cardman's recent number, now maintained by Mrs. Yanstead. He was less surprised to learn from the Tradewind Motel that Mr. Otterly's room also did not answer, and did not even bother to try the minor palazzo where Betty Winchester

was guesting.

He called Corrington's home and learned that the body which was not Cardman's had been set aside pending further developments; and with that reassurance he was able to enjoy a quiet dinner at the P e t i t e Marmite, and go to bed early with a book for company, and sleep for eight hours without a troublesome t h o u g h t about death, murder, or deceit, Some of which stemmed from a hunch hardening into certainty that he now had all the threads of this incident gathered up and ready to be tied.

At ten o'clock in the morning, which seemed to him a safe and uncomplicating time, he arrived at Prend's Funeral Home. This was an edifice of modest but calculated dignity, rather suggestive of a miniature White House, located far enough from any cemetery to offer a choice of processional routes to suit all budgets. A touch on the bell button elicited a deep tolling from w i t h i n, of a cathedral solemnity which could only irreverently have been called a chime; and a f t e r a suitable pause the door oozed ponderously open, disclosing the overextended hair and rabbit features of Mr. Prend himself.

Except for the physical shell, however, it was an effort to connect this apparition with the celebrant whom Simon had seen Twisting at the Peppermint Lounge. In vocational costume, instead of a snazzy Madras jacket and light tight pants, Mr. Prend wore a suit of dull definitive black and sufficiently antique cut to underline its impregnable propriety. His face was composed into pliable blobs and blanks of potential compassion, attention, tolerance, efficiency, sympathy, and a ruthless ability to distinguish the cheapskates from the sincere mourners who would blow the works for a properly expensive casket. Only the red-rimmed eyes behind his semi-invisible bifocals might have caused an initiated cynic to wonder if he had spent another night at the Peppermint L o u n g e or elsewhere, but to less mundane observers they could still have passed for nothing worse than the penalties of excessive condolence.

"Good morning, sir," intoned Mr. Prend, with infinite discretion. "Can I help you?"

His voice was as consciously deep as the door-bell, and the Saint was hard put to sustain his own gravity.

He used his *Miami Guardian* masquerade again to get as far as the reception room, which was furnished in ebony wood and black leather, with a very deep purple carpet, and matching velvet drapes, and gray walls on one of which hung a large chromo-lithograph of the Resurrection.

"There are not many questions I can answer," Mr. Prend

warned him. "As far as most details are concerned, I am bound by professional secrecy, just like a doctor or a lawyer."

"As a matter of general principle," Simon said, "how do you handle a body that's been willed to a hospital?"

"No differently from any other, for most of the proceedings. We embalm it and dress it and lay it in a casket for those who may wish to look their last on the remains—"

"Why embalm it, if it's going to be dissected anyway?"

"That makes the preservation even more important. And the institutions prefer us to do it. It is an art which we are highly trained for and experienced in."

"Is the body complete? I mean, with all its innards?"

Mr. Prend winced.

"Of course. Without the internal organs, it would be of much less value for research."

"So then do they have a regular funeral?"

"That is entirely at the option of the relatives. There can be a procession to a church, if they wish, or a ceremony can be performed in the chapel which is attached to most of the better Funeral Homes. If the purpose of your article is to enlighten readers who may be thinking of bequeathing their remains to a research institution, you can assure them that everything can be handled with dignity and as reverently as any other disposal."

"Up to the point where the coffin isn't buried or cremated."

"That is the only difference. The mourners leave, having paid all their respects to the loved one, and as far as they are concerned it is all over. The Funeral Director then takes charge of the remains and delivers them as soon as possible to the designated institution, from whom he obtains a receipt. And that is the end of it."

It was coming to one of those situations where the Saint mentally craved the gesture of lighting a cigarette, but he knew that a genuine reporter from the *Miami Guardian* would have been too respectful of his surroundings and the pompous side of Mr. Prend to succumb to it.

"In the case of Mr. Cardman, whom you processed recently," he said, "how did that work out?"

"There was a simple service in our chapel, attended only by his immediate kin. And the remains were delivered to the University of Miami, as he wished, the next day."

"So they were here overnight, after any of the relatives saw them."

"Yes."

"The night during which your place was burgled, wasn't it?"

Mr. Prend seemed to make an effort of recollection.

"Yes, it would have been that night."

"Then is it possible," said the

Saint, "that the real object of whoever broke in was to switch Cardman's body for another one that you had here?"

"Preposterous!" Prend ejaculated. "What makes you think—"

"The body that you delivered to the University of Miami has already been un-identified: whoever it is, it isn't Cardman."

Mr. Prend stared at him stiffly.

"But why would anyone do that?" he protested mechanically.

"To destroy the evidence of a murder. Someone who knew the ropes realized that if Cardman's body went to the University — which was something they hadn't counted on till that part of the will showed up — somebody in the lab might spot the signs of poisoning in those internal organs. The easy answer was a switch to another coffin that was booked for something final like a crematorium."

Mr. Prend's roseate optics kindled at last like the tail lights of a car whose driver has belatedly trampled the brakes.

"That could explain it!" he gasped. "I never thought of it before . . . But who? Mr. Cardman's niece was so charming. His nephew was a little difficult. But—"

"Neither of them made the funeral arrangements, did they? Being comparative strangers in town, they'd have had to ask someone who lived here to recommend an undertaker. Someone with previous experience."

"Yes, I suppose so. We rely a great deal on recommendations."

"In Cardman's case, it was probably Mrs. Yanstead."

"Yes—yes, I suppose it was."

"Aloysius," said the Saint chummily, "how much of the take did she cut you in on for shuffling the bods?"

Mr. Prend remained rigid for so long that Simon wondered briefly whether he had inadvertently become a candidate for his own services. But at last his catalepsy resolved itself into the wrathful indignation which after all was the only plausible form it could have taken.

"How dare you—"

"Aloysius," said the Saint, still more mildly, "according to your own explanation, Cardman's body would have to be switched for another one which wasn't going to be inspected by tender-hearted relatives who might actually look at it and start screaming about the new face you put on Uncle George. Nobody who busted in here out of the blue would know which of the corpses you had in stock would be good for the switch. Only the boss could have handled everything — but also been smart enough to set up some evidence of a bogus burglary to make it look like an outside job, just in case something went sour and he had to answer embarrassing questions. Should

I take it that you're all organized and set up and ready to take a murder rap?"

"What gives you the right to talk about a murder?"

"I believe that's called an educated guess. First, you look for a motive. Anyone who expected to inherit his money could have that. And might have had an awful shock when a will turned up that left it all to somebody else. Then we ask, if he was poisoned — and he certainly wasn't shot or stabbed — who had the best chance to do it? At least two people. But who would have been most aware of the risks of poisoning, which have tripped up so many amateurs? Who would have been best placed to mislead the doctor about symptoms? Who would have realized first that Cardman's surprise bequest of his body to the University could upset the whole beautiful applecart, who would know enough about the routines to see how it could still be propped up, who would know the local undertakers and which one would be most likely to go along with a little persuasion—"

"That's all," said a voice behind him.

Simon turned.

It was Velma Yanstead, as his ears had already told him; but his ears could not have told him that she would be holding an automatic in her pudgy hand, levelled at him from a distance at which it would be difficult to miss.

"I thought you were too smooth and goodlooking to be a real reporter," she said libellously. "But you don't talk like a policeman, either. What's your real name and what's your business?"

"Madam," Simon replied courteously, "I'm best known as The Saint. I'm a meddler."

The name registered visibly on both of them, in different ways. Mr. Prend seemed to wilt and deflate as if struck by a dreadful blight, but Mrs. Yanstead seemed to swell and harden in the same proportion. There must have been something after all, Simon reflected with incurable philosophy, in that old adage about the female of the species.

"Well, you meddled once too often this time," she said. "I've read enough about you to know how you work. You're on your own, and keep everything to yourself till you think it's all wrapped up. So you can just disappear, and it'll be months before anyone even wonders where you went."

"Such is fame," sighed the Saint.

Mrs. Yanstead was no more amused than Queen Victoria. She had come in from the hallway, as had the Saint, but now she indicated a door on the other side of Mr. Prend.

"We got to get rid of him now," she said sternly. "And

you'll be no worse off than you are already."

She was now addressing Mr. Prend, who gulped and swallowed his tonsils, his larynx, and possibly other things.

"But—"

"Go along with it, Al," Simon advised him kindly. "Surely you can find room for me in there, in one of your king-sized caskets, alongside some scrawny stiff who's paid for a cremation. And no one will ever know . . . Except you might have to marry her, and give up that bleached b l o n d e you've been dating in Miami Beach—"

"That's *quite* enough," Mrs. Yanstead said, and prodded the Saint with her gun.

This was one of the most foolish things she ever did. Not because Simon was unduly stuffy or ticklish about being prodded, but because the touch of the gun enabled him to locate its position exactly without telegraphing any hint of his intention by glancing at it. His hands moved together l i k e striking snakes, his left hand catching her wrist, his right hand striking the gun and bending her hand backwards with it. The one shot she fired shook the room like a thunderclap, but the muzzle of the automatic was already deflected before she could react and pull the trigger.

Simon Templar sat down in Mr. Aloysius Prend's place at the desk, using the same gun to cover the two of them, and picked up the telephone.

"We can deny all of this," Mrs. Yanstead said to her accomplice, who was now visibly trembling with a subtle but definite vibration that might have started a new wave at the Peppermint Lounge if it could only have been demonstrated there. "It's only his word against ours, and there are two of us—"

"I wouldn't bet too much on that," said the Saint dishearteningly. "I didn't wear a jacket on a warm day like this just to look like the correct respectable costume for visiting Funeral Homes. I wanted a place to hang a microphone and carry a miniature tape recorder, because I k n o w how skeptical some authorities are about my unsupported t e s t i mony." He opened his coat and s h o w e d them. "Wonderful things, these transistors. I w o n d e r what Sherlock Holmes w o u l d have done with them — I must ask a friend of mine. Now would you like to give me the police number or have I got to ask the operator?"

riddle of the blueblood murders

by . . . Stuart Palmer

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Big bad wolf, big bad wolf?

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? dum diddy dum di dum. . . . "

Emilie Vail had sung the one about "Fairies at the Bottom of My Garden," and "Birmingham Bertie," and she had her audience, as was her wont, in the hollow of her hand. Now, as she concluded a spirited rendition of another classic of yesterday, an angular lady who sat in the fourth row of the mezzanine turned to her somewhat grizzled companion and said, "Oscar, aren't you sorry that you didn't take me to the Philharmonic, after all?"

But Inspector Oscar Piper preferred the Palace for his evenings of relaxation. "Watch her," he told Miss Withers. "She's good."

As the song ended, Emilie Vail took a quick step backward and locked arms with two charming if somewhat plumper young ladies who suddenly appeared from the wings. All three cavorted about the stage to the catchy tune, now and then displaying enough of their

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There were times when Inspector Piper would wonder why he hadn't chosen a saner profession. His door would burst open and Hildegarde Withers, schoolma'am-detective and somewhat less than loved at Homicide, would stand there, brandishing her umbrella at all and sundry, insisting he again get involved in something annoying—or deadly . . .

backs to show that each wore, over her evening gown, a gayly twisted tail affixed behind.

"Three Little Pigs," said the Inspector joyously. At that moment the three gaily dancing figures stopped short. From behind a "prop" tree there bounded onto the stage a grotesque creature wearing black trousers and an insecure silk hat. It was a *Borzoi,* a Russian wolfhound, looking fearsome and tremendous except for the fact that his tail was, naturally, wagging. But Ivanitch was a fair actor. He approached the three terrified women, stopped short facing them, and braced himself upon his haunches. He barked, hollowly, and then a wind machine offstage began to roar.

"He's supposed to be blowing their clothes off," the Inspector confided.

The Three Little Pigs wept and begged and pleaded, but off went their hats in a wild swoop to the wings, followed by the vari-colored silken coats. With exaggerated r i p p i n g sounds, a dress gave way, and the plump little girl on the right stood arrayed only in make-up and a lacy wisp of French underwear. The crowd roared.

The *Borzoi* barked obediently once more, and the dress of the plump girl on the left gave way and flew off in two pieces. She, too, was huddled in fragile nothings. More frantic applause.

Then a hush fell over the audience. It was Emilie Vail's turn. When the wolfhound barked a third time, she let out a wild scream, and the audience gasped as the wind whipped off her shimmering gown — leaving her in a suit of red flannel underwear.

The Big Bad Wolf tucked his tail between his legs and scrambled for the wings as The Three Little Pigs took up their ditty again and gamboled in a circle around the stage. The audience applauded wildly as the curtain fell.

In a matter of a few seconds it rose and, remarkably, there stood Emilie Vail, her gown on as if it had jumped back on her body, and not a hair of her magnificent coiffure loose from the "huffing and puffing" of the wolf. She leaned triumphantly on the neatly groomed head of the *Borzoi,* her diamond bracelets sending bright pencils of reflected light over the faces of her audience.

Her follow-through was every bit as professional as her actual performance. She bowed three times, then held out her graceful, bejewelled hand to several eager attendants, and stepped down into the auditorium, where she marched triumphantly up one aisle, across the rear of the house, then down the other aisle. Admirers reached out to touch her gown as it swept by, with Ivanitch trailing obediently behind as he'd done after

each performance during the week.

But this time, as they were about to step back upon the stage, the big animal faltered. Emilie turned to him, a look of puzzlement on her face, and snapped her fingers. But Ivanitch remained where he stood, rocking as though drunk. The audience sensed that this was not part of the act.

Suddenly the wolfhound keeled forward, his forefeet buckled, and he collapsed and rolled over on his side. A distressed murmur went through the throng. A woman sitting on the aisle rose and screamed.

Though it was said that Emilie Vail smiled coldly when unrequited lovers shot themselves for her sake, there was nothing heartless in the way she threw herself to the carpet and lifted the dead wolfhound's head into her lap.

"Well, if it's a publicity stunt we'll read all about it in the papers tomorrow morning," said the Inspector, as he took Miss Withers home. Yet strangely enough, there was no mention of the scene in the theater in any New York daily. A human stooge took the place of poor Ivanitch in the act at the Palace, and the show went on.

Miss Hildegarde Withers and her old friend Inspector Oscar Piper were in the habit of meeting once a week for a mild orgy of spaghetti and the theater. She entered his office at Centre Street one rainy afternoon some days after the tragedy aforementioned, and found him deep in a telephone conversation.

He waved to her, and went on talking. "But it's not up to the Homicide Squad! Your friend would do better to see a vet, or get in touch with the S.P.C.A."

Miss Withers was graced with a long inquisitive nose, and for most of her forty-odd years she had been completely unable to keep it out of other people's business. Her nostrils widened a bit now, as she scented a faint suggestion of the adventure for which she had secretly longed for weeks.

"See him!" she said tersely.

The Inspector looked up at her. "But it's not in my line!"

"It may be in mine," said Miss Withers.

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders and returned to his telephone. "Sorry, Tomlinson. Had a crossed wire. Yes, tell your friend I'll see him. How about Monday?" There was a pause. "Why—yes, I suppose so. He's in the city, you say? Very well, I'll stick around for half an hour, if he can get here by then. Name's Neville, you say? Right you are. G'bye."

He swung around in his chair. "See what you've done? That was Chief Tomlinson of the Bronxville force. Wants me to see a man about a dog. Now

we've got to stick around here.

Miss Withers was fumbling in her capacious handbag. She finally found the clipping for which she sought, and handed it to the Inspector. He read aloud: "For sale, very cheap to good home, pedigreed 18-months-old terrier, wonderful pet, female, must sell, as dog poisoner in neighborhood, phone Prospect 6-4435."

"I clipped that out of the "Times" last Sunday," she told him.

"Looking for a mate for Dempsey?" asked Piper. He smiled, remembering his spinster friend's one unwilling venture into dog-breeding, which had transpired at Catalina Island a year or so before. At the climax of a thrilling series of adventures in murder, the good lady had discovered herself the guardian of a pedigreed wire-haired fox-terrier, the most effervescent, roguish, combative puppy that ever gnawed a slipper.

"I was not." she answered him shortly. "But what do you make of this—and of what happened in the theater the other night?"

"Nothing," said the Inspector. "It happens every now and then that some misbegotten crank takes it into his head to sneak about, poisoning his neighbors' pets because their barking annoys him. This can't have anything to do with the t r o u b l e in Bronxville—the phone exchange mentioned is in Brooklyn."

Miss Withers opened her mouth to say something, but closed it again as the office door opened and the uniformed man in the outer office ushered through a quiet gentleman who announced himself as Henry Neville, president of the Knickerbocker Kennel Club. He wore a pince-nez and a worried look.

"I'll wait outside," suggested Miss Withers. The Inspector said nothing, knowing full well that wild horses could not have dragged her from her chair. Neville looked at her through his glasses, and the Inspector motioned him to proceed. "This lady is my un-official assistant, Miss Withers," he announced.

"Assistant!" muttered the school teacher indignantly. But Neville was getting right down to cases.

"Inspector," he began, "you may not be aware of the fact, but in the last six weeks more than a hundred dogs have been murdered within a radius of fifty miles of this city. This is not the usual matter of a neighborhood crank. With those the S.P.C.A. is quite capable of dealing. But these animals are mysteriously killed, sometimes in broad daylight, by a poison which leaves no traces that veterinary surgeons can discover in the stomach. Sometimes they are even stricken while being walked on a leash

by their owners. . . . "

"The Big Bad Wolf," said Miss Withers cryptically. She was listening eagerly.

"I came to you," Neville went on, "because I happen to know the chief of police in my home town, and he promised to use his influence."

"Yes," objected Piper, "but what has the Homicide Squad got to do with suburban dog poisonings?"

"The squad knows poisons," said Neville. "And this may not be a suburban matter very long. Three weeks from today we are holding or planning to hold, the annual dog show of the Knickerbocker Kennel Club in Madison Square Garden. It has occurred to many of our members that perhaps this fanatic, who has largely confined himself to ordinary mutts on the street, may seize his—or her—opportunity to do wholesale murder among the thousand or so canine bluebloods that will be gathered there. I've talked to private detectives, and found them totally incapable of protecting us and our exhibitors. So I ask your advice."

"Here it is," said Piper, biting his cigar. "Call off the show."

Neville shook his head. "Not as easy as that, Inspector. All over the country—in England, even— breeders of fine dogs are depending upon this show. Handlers and trainers, skilled men who sadly need the work, are beginning to train and condition the elite of dogdom for the bench. A booming dog show means increased business for the kennel men, who have been raising dogs mostly for the love of it these last years. It means that the public will be moved to invest a few dollars in a lifetime friend and companion whom they're proud to be seen leading on a leash; it means——"

"You've got me sold," said Miss Withers softly, thinking of Dempsey.

"If we call off the show, it not only admits failure, it means disappointment, and worse, for hundreds," finished Neville.

"And it also means," the Inspector agreed, "that you'll be knuckling under to a madman who'll go right on murdering harmless, friendly pooches on the street."

"Blast him!" Miss Withers said fervently. Neville sensed an ally in this surprising lady.

"Hmm," said Piper. "I might detail a couple of plainclothes men to cover your show. Or give you a squad of reserves to keep order, if need be."

"Excuse me a moment," broke in Miss Withers. "I've got a better idea even than that." Her angular face was alight, and her nostrils wider than ever. "Just suppose——"

For the next half hour the two men listened and nodded.

Then Henry Neville leaped to his feet. "I'm convinced,"

he announced. "If you're willing to run the risk. Naturally, the Club will stand all costs." He scribbled an address on a card. "Send your dog to this man, and he'll put him in such shape that you won't know him." He paused—"I do believe that you're going to be our Guardian Angel, ma'am."

"With a guardian flatfoot or two in the background," amended the Inspector.

Miss Withers, out of breath from hurrying, showed her badge to the man at the door of Madison Square Garden, and was immediately admitted. It was not, this time, the borrowed badge of the New York detective squad, but only a brass-bound ribbon bearing the gilt letters "Owner."

There was a fair crowd passing in toward the amphitheater, and she followed where they led. Sounds of distant barking came to her ears, and in her nostrils was the pleasantly mingled odor of disinfectants, sawdust, and canine personality that is so characteristic of a dog show anywhere.

The rows of seats in the Garden itself were more than half filled with spectators. Half of the big oval in the center was bare except for a small square platform where officials congregated—the rest of it was taken up by rows upon rows of high boxes with wire-screen fronts, placed like the houses and built-up blocks of a city. Indeed, this was a city—a veritable metropolis of dogdom.

An usher moved to direct her, but relaxed again when he saw her badge. Miss Withers passed down into the arena, and was almost immediately greeted by Mr. Henry Neville, resplendent behind a gold badge marked "President." He was in a highly nervous state, with his pince-nez slipping from his nose, but he left the group with which he seemed to have been arguing, and joined her.

"Everything going well so far," he whispered quickly. "But I feel better now that you're here. We can't talk now—but we'll have a chat later on. Now go ahead and play the part. You're a fond owner, and your dog is in number—let me see—number 82. Excuse me, I have to see a man. . . ."

He turned and bustled off. Miss Withers saw him seize the arm of a tall, saturnine person who looked like a character actor for British colonel roles. "See here, McGrath . . ." he began, angrily, and the two of them passed from sight. Miss Withers went on toward the kennels, trying to look as dog-wise as her fellows. She would have liked to stand in admiration before almost every one of the cages, but tonight she had other fish to fry. Whatever the villain of this piece it was not one of the bored four-footed aristocrats behind the wire.

She passed on, trying to find number 82 without much success. She tried all the main avenues, growing slowly warmer, and then stepped into a little blind alley nearest the barrier that separated the seats from the arena, shut off from view of the crowd. This, too, was lined with wire-fronted boxes.

A dog ahead of her was barking furiously. She paused beside a small fat man in modish knickerbockers, who was engaged in staring through the netting of a cage almost at the end of the line.

He whirled toward her, and she found herself staring into a strange and tremendous instrument which looked like a twisted megaphone. The little man was smiling pleasantly.

"Did you speak?" he asked. He wore a badge similar to her own.

She shook her head. "I am slightly deaf," he continued. He put away the ear-phone. "But I read lips rather well. Beautiful animal, isn't he?"

She agreed that the beast inside was magnificent, in spite of the barking that assailed her ear-drums. The name on a card above the box was "Surefire Scout." He was a wire-haired terrier, this immaculate beast, and as she glanced at his eager face Miss Withers realized that her own poor Dempsey would look sad indeed beside such a perfect specimen.

Her companion was rattling on, evidently glad of somebody to talk to who did not interrupt. The dog behind the wire whined and cocked his head first to the left, then right, and Miss Withers noticed his eyes. Good heavens—this *was* Dempsey! Sure enough, the box bore the figures "82"—there was no mistake.

His furry hair had been plucked from his body except on face, forelegs, and chest. He had been conditioned so as to lose several pounds. His tail was held more erectly, his neck was upright at a strange and classic angle, and his ears hugged his skull as they had never done in real life. But it was Dempsey all the same. For a moment the school-teacher forgot her mission and rubbed the shiny black button of a nose that was pressed to the netting. "*Surefire Scout* indeed!" she said.

The little man was beaming. "And to think," he said bitterly, "that there are people in this world who can poison a little fellow like that!"

Miss Withers looked up suddenly. The man had voiced her innermost thoughts. Her companion pointed to the wire netting "Ought to be glass," he said. "Why, any one of the thousands who walk past these cages could toss a bit of poisoned meat inside, and be on his way before the dog was dead."

She agreed that it was possible. The little man introduced himself as Peter A. Holt, of the Holt Color and Dye Works, Hoboken, and said that he was very glad to meet Miss Hildegarde Withers. "Now I've admired your dog, you'll have to have a look at mine," he said, leading her down the alley a short distance. "Devonshire Lad's his name."

Devonshire Lad was a collie, a great tan and white creature with a long, pointed muzzle. As his master approached, the collie looked up, and then dropped his head on his paws again.

Miss Withers praised him, but Holt shook his head. "I'm afraid Lad is out of his class here. You're going to be luckier than I. That terrier of yours ought to go into Winners. Yes, ma'am, I have an idea that the great Mr. McGrath will pin a red, or even a blue ribbon on that dog of yours."

"Oh, is he the judge?" Miss Withers asked, and could have bitten off her tongue.

"The judge? Of course he is. Why everybody knows that Andrew McGrath has judged terriers and Alsatians at every show in the last ten years." Holt stared at her not unkindly. "You must be as green at this as I. I've only had Lad a few weeks, and this is my first show, too. Don't be ashamed to admit it, we all have to start."

They were shoved aside by an incoming crush of visitors. A family stopped to admire the eager Dempsey, under his *nom de guerre*, and then surged toward the bored collie, who finally condescended to approach the wire and permit his white muzzle to be touched by the smallest child.

"I'll see you later," said Miss Withers, into the gaping ear-trumpet. Then she passed on, leaving little Mr. Holt admiring his collie and gently whistling the universal tune of "The Big Bad Wolf."

She was looking for Mr. Neville, but he was not to be seen. Finally she asked someone, and was told that she might be able to find the president in the offices which were located down the runway and beneath the tiers of seats.

She found a door marked "office." Voices came from within, but there was no answer to her gentle knock. She pushed the door open, and saw a tableau which she was never to forget.

A whisky bottle lay smashed and reeking in the middle of the floor. Beyond it two men were confronting each other, their faces almost touching. One was the quiet, mild-mannered Henry Neville, and the other she recognized as the colonel-ish man whom he had called McGrath.

"You can mind your bloody business," the latter was say-

ing, in a voice that was like breaking sticks. "I'll do what I please."

"You'll make an effort to act like a gentleman," said Neville. "I've made all the allowances for you that I'm going to make. I don't care who you are, you'll conform to the rules of the Club . . ."

Miss Withers, as yet unnoticed, began to withdraw. But she still had time to see the larger man extend a mightly palm and press it full against the face of Mr. Henry Neville. He shoved— and the president of the Knickerbocker Kennel Club, dignity and all, went over backwards.

McGrath turned, and came out of the office, his face strangely contorted. He pushed past Miss Withers without seeing her, and she heard him utter—"Damn all dogs and all fools who breed 'em . . .!"

Miss Withers saw that this was not the time for her to have a chat with the pleasant Mr. Neville. She tiptoed softly back toward the amphitheater.

She spent the rest of the evening patrolling the avenues between the dog cages, keeping a sharp lookout for any signs of the mysterious marauder. The crowds were thick, and extremely innocent-seeming. She met several other owners, and was inevitably introduced to their precious exhibits. Every time she passed the cage wherein her own Dempsey was confined, the dog forgot all the manners that had been impressed upon him in three weeks of rigorous training, and bounced up and down in eagerness to get out.

Closing time arrived, and she saw the odd little Mr. Holt saying goodnight to his collie, who evinced no interest in his master. The crowd thinned out, and Miss Withers, glad that nothing had happened, moved toward the doors. She was intercepted by Henry Neville, whose face was very red, and whose lips were gray.

"Won't you come back to my office?" he invited. "Things seem to be going along quietly, except for a little trouble we're having with one of our judges. All the same, I'd like your ideas on the other situation."

He led the way back to the little office. which had been straightened since Miss Withers saw it last. The broken whisky bottle was gone.

Miss Withers plunged at once into her own suggestion for safeguarding the situation, which was to have plateglass installed instead of wire netting in all the cages. Neville seemed only half listening to her, but he shook his head. "Think of the cost," he said. "Besides, the public would object, and the owners be unduly alarmed at the necessity for the scheme."

The talk dwindled. Miss

Withers looked at him, playing a wild hunch. "I wonder," she said, "if you'd tell me just what is the trouble in regard to Mr. Judge McGrath?"

Neville looked at her sharply. "Trouble? Nothing at all, really. The man is an excellent judge of dogs. His wife and he used to have a big kennel themselves, and he is the last word on disputed points. But he's taken to drinking himself to death, and it's bad for the Club. I wish we'd never hired the gentleman for this job. . . . There're plenty o t h e r s who'd do anything to get in his shoes."

Neville shrugged his shoulders. "He'll probably be all right tomorrow, though. The judging starts at nine o'clock, and terriers come first."

"I know that," said Miss Withers. "I was just wondering. Am I not likely to show that I know nothing of handling a dog when the time comes to lead Dempsey up to the stand? I'd like to take him myself, but still—"

"Simple enough," said Neville cheerily. He reached for a telephone on his desk. "The dogs have been fed and exercised by now, and I'll get one of the kennel men to bring your pooch in here, and demonstrate how you should act." He rattled the receiver, and got no answer. "Must be that the boys are gone for the night. Wait here, I'll fetch him myself."

In something o v e r ten minutes he was back, with a wriggling Dempsey under his arm "It's almost pitch-dark in there," he announced. "I had trouble getting the key to the boxlock. Somebody must have turned out the wrong lights."

He searched in his desk for a light whip-leash and loose collar, and the next half hour was spent in technicalities. Miss Withers learned facts which had already been well impressed upon her pet by the trainer in Westchester who had labored with him for weeks. Finally, Neville said that she would pass muster.

They went back into the arena, dimly lit by a cluster of tiny bulbs high in the ceiling. Far ahead of them exit lights gleamed dully, like evil red eyes in the gloom. As their eyes became accustomed to the darkness, they managed to make their way between the high-ranked cages, with Dempsey growling at every sleeping occupant. Finally they came to the last alley-way . . .

Suddenly Dempsey wriggled out of his mistress' arms, and dropped to the sawdust. He plunged forward as if hot on the scent of something, and then stopped short, his legs braced wide and a salvo of barks issuing from his mouth. The noise died away to a nervous, unsteady whining. The hair on his back was bristling . . .

"Who's there?" cried Neville.

Nobody answered. Dempsey huddled against his mistress' stocking.

Miss Withers produced a tiny affair of polished nickel from the depths of her handbag, and cast its beam ahead of them. The alley-way was empty. They went softly forward.

"Something is wrong here," Miss Withers decided suddenly. She sniffed, and found that there was an odd, sweetish-bitterish odor above the smells of dog.

Something was very wrong. The two humans realized at last what Dempsey had known from the beginning — those eight cages contained the bodies of seven dogs. Some of them appeared to be sleeping, but it was the long sleep that knows no waking.

Neville was shouting for the night-watchman. "Clyde! Where are you?"

There was no answer. Neville pressed against the wire-netting which screened the nearest cage. "Dead—all of them, in torments! It's happened while we were wasting our time in the office. What insane devil out of hell could do a thing like this?"

Miss Withers did not think that his question required an answer. She was staring at Devonshire Lad, the big bored collie of which little Mr. Holt had been so proud. Devonshire Lad was only a tumbled pile of fur now.

Neville was still shouting for "Clyde." Finally there came an answering hail from the distance. But Miss Withers paid no attention to the breathless and perspiring night-watchman when he trotted into the scene. She was watching Dempsey, who was walking stealthily forward, his nose pointed into the shadows beneath the cage of Devonshire Lad.

He was sniffing, and seemed to be stalking something. Miss Withers sent her flash ahead, and saw what it was. The circle of yellow light fell upon the gaunt face of Andrew McGrath, reputed to be America's best judge of terriers. He was dead, quite dead. Clutched firmly in his right hand was a large bottle more than half full. Through the loose cork came the tell-tale odor of bitter almonds . . .

Neville was demanding to know where Clyde had been. "Didn't I tell you to keep your eyes open?"

"You told me to see to the doors, and that's what I was doing," said the old man belligerently.

"But the lights! They're supposed to be on all night. Who turned them out?"

"So help me," said the watchman Clyde, "I thought you did!"

Miss Withers, not without a qualm, put Dempsey back into

his cage and snapped the lock. "Where's the nearest telephone?" she then demanded.

It was four o'clock in the morning when Miss Withers finally left the Garden. The Inspector's myrmidons had descended upon the place with flashlight powders, cameras, and fingerprint apparatus, but their general opinion was that they were wasting their time on a snipe-hunt.

Medical Examiner Bloom himself condescended to put in a brief appearance in full evening dress, and the wagon from the Department of Justice finally carried away the body of the dead man and the bodies of the seven dead dogs.

The Inspector led Miss Withers to a little all-night lunch counter on Eighth Avenue, and ordered ham and eggs and coffee for two.

"Don't take it so hard," he said. "You did all you could. But you were looking for an outsider, and not a judge of the dog show himself."

"Oh, that!" she said. Then—"Oscar, in spite of what Dr. Bloom says, do you believe that McGrath was the dog poisoner, and that he killed himself in remorse?"

"I'd like to know how you could give any other explanation," Piper retorted. "He had that bottle of prussic acid gripped in his hands, tight as a vise. No one could have put it there. Besides, with his wife dying a few months ago from blood poisoning that she got through the bite of a dog she was buying, he had reason enough to hate the whole canine tribe. Neville told me the whole story. Says that McGrath had been queer ever since the tragedy. Tonight he must have had one last orgy and then finished off himself." The Inspector looked pleased with such a facile explanation.

Then Miss Withers stuck a pin in his balloon. "You think that McGrath took a sip from the poison bottle, carefully recorked it, and then died?"

"By George!" The Inspector wagged his head. "Cyanide of potassium, especially in liquid form as prussic acid, is the strongest and quickest known poison. He wouldn't have had time to recork it—a few drops on his tongue would have knocked him out." Piper stopped. "Yet, look here. Bloom swears that he doesn't need an autopsy to know that McGrath died from the stuff in that bottle."

"When you answer my first question," Miss Withers cruelly went on, "I wish you'd tell me how the poisoner got the dogs to come up to the wire netting and take a sip from his bottle, in the first place. He had no meat, nothing to dope with the acid . . ."

Piper shook his head. "Then it wasn't suicide. And we're

right back where we started." He looked at the school teacher for guidance, which was unlike him.

Miss Withers was grim. "The dog show must go on tomorrow as usual," she insisted. "I'm going to have another try. I believe that a madman was loose in the Garden tonight—and with nearly a thousand dogs gathered there, he won't be able to keep away. I think I'm beginning to see something, but I'm going ahead as planned. Do me a favor, and have the newspapers hush up this 'suicide' as much as you can."

He nodded, and went to the wall-telephone. He gave some instructions to his office, and then called another number. He listened for some time, and then came back. "Bloom and three assistants are almost finished with the autopsy on the stiff," he told the school teacher. "He says it's prussic acid all right. Each of the dogs had a trace of it around the mouth, but none in the stomach. The man must have choked to death on the stuff, for there's a good bit of poison in the nasal passages. Bloom says he never ran across that before. He still holds out for simple suicide."

"'Things are seldom what they seem,'" quoted Miss Withers wearily. "I'm for home and bed. T o m o r r o w I've got to play a lone hand, and outbluff this murderer."

She was n o t so confident when, shortly before nine o'clock the next morning, she was back at the Garden, after a few hours of fitful slumber filled with dreams of the little dog Dempsey in which he wore a silk hat and drank prussic acid from a silver flask.

Yet he was safe and sound when she came to his lonely cage among the seven empty boxes. Indeed, he was carrying on a long-range verbal battle with a terrier somewhere in the next row—a dignified, nettled terrier whose deep growls befitted an aristocrat named Champion Million-dollar Highboy.

There were not many spectators at this early hour, Miss Withers noticed. What people there were had been firmly ushered to the front tiers of seats nearest the platform, from which they could overlook the judging. A goodly crowd of owners and experts stood in a semi-circle around the platform, evidently waiting for things to begin.

She had a look around for poor little Mr. Holt, seeking to commiserate with him for the loss of Devonshire Lad, but the man was not to be seen. Mr. Neville she noticed in the center of a circle of indignant dog-owners, and she heard him wearily explaining that the club had taken out insurance against just such a tragedy as

had occurred last night, and that they would be reimbursed for the loss of their pets. She tried without success to catch his eye.

The work of judging terriers was beginning, with a brisk, self-satisfied young man—somebdy said his name was Kearling—as the substitute for the great McGrath. He looked extremely pleased with himself. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," she observed.

A trainer brought Dempsey to her, and the little dog looked the part of "Surefire Scout," for he had been well brushed, dusted with chalk, and otherwise prepared for the supreme test. Miss Withers took the leash, and wondered if, after all, she was really fooling anybody as to her real mission here. One after another she saw magnificent specimens of dogdom circle around the sawdust, mount the "bench," and come under the sharp eye and exploring hands of Judge Kearling.

Some he quickly motioned away, to be grouped forever among the goats. Others went into a smaller grouping, while Champion Million-dollar Highboy stood alone, sure of his blue ribbons and looking like a painted, calendar dog.

Her turn came, and in full view of the crowd Miss Withers led a sober and sedate Dempsey around a bit, and then to the bench. He was almost, but not quite, wagging his tail.

Kearling bent down, dictating swift, nervous sentences to an aide who kept score. He patted Dempseys' rump. "Stern, ten points," he said. "Hind legs eight. Barrel and shoulders nine. Ears—"

His practised hands felt of the cocked ears, and Dempsey immediately forgot all that had been so patiently drilled into him. This was a very nice man, thought Dempsey, a man who smelled charmingly of dog. Rising swiftly on his hind legs, he licked Kearling across the face. The crowd gasped. It was as if a debutante being presented at Court had kissed the King!

Kearling jerked erect, and frowned. He raised his hand, and started to say the word "Disqualif—" But for some reason he thought better of it. He knelt again, avoiding Dempsey's friendly red tongue, and completed his examination. "Ears—zero, because surgically dropped. Skull, two points, because of overwidth. Jaw . . ."

It was soon over. Dempsey went, as Miss Withers had feared, among the goats. Not even superb preparation and conditioning would conceal the fact that his skull differed tremendously from the narrow brain-pans of the over-bred elect. Surprisingly enough, the little dog seemed to realize the slight, and when the blue ribbon went to the bored and beau-

tiful Champion Million-dollar Highboy he growled deep in his throat.

As required by rule, the judge passed cheerfully among the disgruntled owners, explaining his findings. When he came to Miss Withers he stroked Dempsey kindly. "I'd rather own him than the Champ," he comforted her. "But show dogs are being bred for narrow skulls, because they don't need brains."

"Do judges?" Miss Withers almost said aloud. She glared suspiciously at the brisk young man. Was his soft-soaping her an evidence of some feeling on his part that she was a person to be placated? Did he guess her real mission here? She remembered that Neville had said that there were those who would do anything to get in McGrath's shoes.

Miss Withers led a subdued little dog back toward his cage, as a procession of Aberdeens trotted forward to face the judge. She noticed that the Garden management, no doubt taking advantage of the smallness of the crowd at this hour, had set two singularly inept looking carpenters to work repairing a slightly damaged step leading to the tiers of seats.

As she entered the alley-way, she stopped short and very nearly disgraced herself by screaming. For one horrible moment she thought that her mind had given way and that she was seeing things—witnessing a ghastly repetition of the tragedy of the previous evening.

For Henry Neville was leaning down beneath the empty cage that was Dempsey's, and dragging something forth from the shadows, just as the body of McGrath had been dragged only a few hours ago. Yet this was, at any rate, not a corpse.

It was Peter A. Holt, and the little manufacturer was spluttering and bubbling with wrath. "Take your hands off me! Let me go!"

Neville's glasses were slipping from his nose, but he was tightly holding on. Dempsey, who loved a fight of any kind, barked encouragingly and fought to get out of Miss Withers' arms. The two men stopped struggling, as they looked up and saw the spinster approaching.

The president of the Knickerbocker Kennel Club was rosy with triumph. "Got him!" he announced ungrammatically. "Here's the little rat who was lurking underneath your dog's cage—no doubt waiting for a chance to poison him, and complete last night's work."

Miss Withers frowned. There was more in this than met the eye. "Lucky you happened to be here," she said. "By the way, just how did *you* happen to be here!"

Neville flushed, but he still kept a grip on Holt. "Why,

shouldn't I be here? I was keeping an eye on the cages, just to make sure that nothing more went wrong. And I saw a movement under the cage."

Mr. Holt still clung to his ear-trumpet. "He's mad, mad as a hatter," he confided to Miss Withers when he got a chance to speak. "Or else crazy drunk. And he has the colossal nerve to say that *I* was lurching!"

"Not lurching—lurking," repeated Neville angrily.

"He thinks you're the dog-poisoner," Miss Withers shouted into the ear-trumpet. Holt's round little face lightened.

"He thinks I'd kill my own prize collie?" The man laughed ruefully. "Then he *is* mad! Why, I came down here this morning and hid myself under the cage hoping to catch the person who was responsible for what happened last night. I thought he might come around again, and I'd nab him."

Miss Withers looked thoughtful, but Neville laughed jeeringly. "Yeah? Well, we'll just have in the police, and see what they find on you, mister."

Holt looked worried, for the first time. "If you cause me any unpleasant publicity," he promised, "I'll see that you have a lawsuit on your hands inside twenty-four hours. But if searching me is all you want, go to it here and now."

He held his arms away from his body. Neville searched him, wrathfully, and found nothing. There was no trace of anything that could have caused death to a dog or a human being.

Miss Withers remarked casually that something might have been dropped beneath the dog-cage. But Neville only drew another blank. There was no use going further.

He drew himself up stiffly. "Mr. Holt, I apologize most sincerely. But if you knew how the events of last night had worried and upset me. . . ."

Holt took it well. He offered to shake hands. "I knew," he said. "I felt the same way. Our intentions were both of the best."

Neville, still feeling embarrassed, rushed away to his proper place beside the judging stand, and Miss Withers drew a little nearer to the ruffled little manufacturer. He stroked Dempsey with a hand that trembled. "Nice fellow," he said. Dempsey seemed still subdued by the ill fortune that had attended his efforts at passing as a showdog. He drew away.

Miss Withers murmured proper condolences to the man who had lost his own pet. "I'll get the one who did it," promised Holt tensely, "if it takes the rest of my life. McGrath was no dog-poisoner, and he did not commit suicide. I know—he has been in the Middle West judging shows for a month or so, and he could not have been

responsible for the poisonings in the metropolitan area here. We must look closer to home."

Miss Withers spoke the word "Exactly" into his ear-trumpet.

"I was just thinking," said Holt. "Neville and McGrath have been at cats and dogs lately . . . and they had a fight yesterday, so I hear. I wonder——"

So was Miss Withers wondering. She put Dempsey back into his cage, and carefully snapped the lock into place. According to her orders, a close wire screen had been tacked up inside the wide wire netting, and she knew that he was safer there than anywhere else in the building. Yet, somehow, she felt that she was doing the wrong thing.

She turned to Holt. "Going to keep on with the sleuthing?"

He nodded. "But not here. I've got a hunch—a real clue." He drew closer to her. "Is it true that you've got some connection with the police?"

"Er—yes, and again no," she answered.

But Holt went on. "I know you have." He looked quickly around. "We may be watched. Meet me in Neville's office in five minutes, and unless I miss my guess I'll be able to show you something that will surprise you!" The little man was quite evidently under the strain of intense excitement. "I see it!" he cried. "I see it all—will you help me?"

"I'd like to know what it's all about," said Miss Withers.

"I'll show you," he promised. "I'll c o n v i n c e you, sure enough."

"Very well," she spoke into the trumpet. "I'll meet you." The little man darted away, in the direction of the judging stand, and she watched through narrowed eyes while he engaged Kearling in close conversation.

Then Miss Withers walked slowly down the runway which led under the stairs toward Neville's office. The door was unlocked, but she did not enter. She stood thoughtfully outside for a moment, and then on a wild impulse turned around and hurried back whence she had come.

The thought had just occurred to her that perhaps, even behind the barrier of fine s c r e e n, Dempsey was not as safe as she had thought him. He had been trained never to take food from an unknown hand—but the little dog was most over-friendly with all humankind. . . . A n d suppose poisoned food was not the means used by the poisoner?

Miss Withers came scurrying past the rows of kennels, noticing as she came that not even a kennel boy or a handler was about. In the ring they were judging Alsatians, and every one was clustered close to see the beautiful tawny police dogs, with their wolf-like heads.

"Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf—" Miss Withers found the silly tune running through her head. As she turned the corner leading to the alley-way in which Dempsey was confined, she stopped short, knowing the truth.

The whole puzzle arranged itself swiftly in her mind—even before she saw the little figure of Holt leaning against Dempsey's cage. His ear-trumpet was in his hand, and he was gaily whistling the little tune, as she had heard him whistle it before.

Terror gripped her as Holt looked up, with a wide smile on his face.

"Get tired of waiting?" he asked. "Something delayed me. I was just having a look around."

Miss Withers tried to control her face, and could not. She stared at the wire, and saw that Dempsey stood watching her, wagging his tail. It had not happened—yet. Then she noticed that a tiny hole had been torn in the wire which protected the little dog.

Holt saw her glance turn in that direction, and he stopped whistling. "You noticed that, eh?" He came closer to her. "Too bad."

Miss Withers tried to scream, but as in a nightmare her voice failed her. Only Dempsey heard the gasp, and leaped frantically against his cage in an effort to come forth to the rescue.

Holt walked toward Miss Withers, who moved falteringly backward. She was out of the alley-way, crossing the main avenue of kennels. Here and there a dog, disturbed by currents which he could sense and not understand, whined a little.

She still moved away from that smiling face, from the hand that was sliding within the ear-trumpet. Then she found her back against a barrier.

Peter A. Holt, manufacturer of colors and dyes, drew a fat hypodermic needle from its place of concealment within the ear-trumpet. "If you want to know who killed McGrath, go and ask him in hell," said the madman.

And still nobody came. . . .

Miss Withers gasped, and knew that he had been waiting just for that. He thrust the needle within a foot of her face, and his thumb touched the plunger. . . .

She waited for the thin, stinging stream of prussic acid to strike her face.

High on the steps leading to the rows of vacant seats above, a white-clad carpenter snatched from his tool kit a pair of powerful binoculars. He handled them more cleverly than he had been using his saw and hammer.

"My God," he cried. "What

are you waiting for?"

His companion sighted along the barrel of a blue-black police target pistol, and pulled the trigger with a soft and loving squeeze.

A leaden bullet mushroomed against the madman's chest, and he was thrown back. He staggered, but did not fall. Nor did he lower the hypodermic needle, though his hand trembled.

He rammed the plunger home, with a wild shriek. But the delay had given Miss Withers time to regain her paralyzed senses, and to turn. She felt a thin spattering of liquid against her hair at the back of her neck. At the time she thought nothing of it, but as long as she lived she was to wear a bald spot there, as large as a dime.

The two erstwhile carpenters were racing over the sawdust, and they arrived on the scene to find both parties to this fantastic finale lying stretched out on the ground. Miss Withers regained control almost at once, to find Inspector Oscar Piper bending over her.

"I'm afraid I wasn't much of a success at playing a lone hand, this time," she confessed weakly. "Oh, Oscar, why didn't you tell me that you were planning to double-cross me?"

The Inspector was surveying what was left of Holt, crumpled on the sawdust floor.

"Rotten shot," he said, accusingly, to Detective-Sergeant Georgie Swarthout. "I told you to wing him, didn't I?"

"I aimed for the wing and got the wish-bone," said the young marksman cheerfully. "And I saved the State several thousands of dollars, incidentally. Shall I ring up the boys?"

"Of course," said Miss Withers later in Neville's office, "I didn't have the wit to see that all the killings must have been done in some such manner. Only from a hypodermic needle could poison have been sprayed on all those dogs who have been killed during the past month or so. Remember how it happened in the theater—and yet nobody saw anything? Prussic acid is the only poison that can cause death that way when it touches the tongue or the nasal passages."

"The needle's been used by racketeers recently to spray acid through keyholes and thus to ruin clothes in rival tailor shops," Piper told her.

But she was proceeding. "Who but a maker of colors and dyes would have had access to unlimited amounts of prussic acid, which is the main ingredient of Prussian blue, as every schoolboy knows? Holt had such success with his poisonings in the streets that he got the idea of entering the dog-show as an owner, and bought his collie to carry out the illusion."

"How could he, if he hated dogs, as you say?"

"Well, he killed his own dog first. Psychologists call such men caniphobiacs, Oscar. McGrath must have come along and caught Holt in the act. They struggled, and McGrath got hold of the poison bottle from which the madman had been refilling his syringe. Holt saw he was getting the worst of it, so he pulled out his needle and sprayed cyanide in the other man's face. McGrath naturally gasped—and that did for him."

"That might explain the poison in McGrath's nostrils that puzzled Doc Bloom so much," agreed Piper.

"Of course. I should have guessed at the truth from the way Holt's dog ignored him. The beast was neither friendly nor afraid—he simply had never got acquainted with his master. Probably just purchased, before the show."

The Inspector was puzzled. "But why should Holt endanger himself by trying to continue today what he started last night?"

"He was mad, Oscar. Last night Neville and I came into the place talking, and our voices warned Holt away before he had time to do more than tumble the body of McGrath out of sight. He ran off and forgot his bottle of poison, so all he had was whatever was left in his syringe. He may have come back here looking for the bottle this morning. At any rate, he could not resist sending me on a fool's errand when he saw that I was interested in the case, and it must have appealed to a madman's sense of humor to think that while I waited for him in the office here, he was putting the finishing touches to my own dog. That would make his crimes dramatically complete in his warped mind."

Henry Neville knocked on the door of his own office and entered, with a glass of water for Miss Withers. She drank it gratefully.

"And all the time," that lady concluded, "there was a fine, fair clue staring us in the face. Holt carried an ear-trumpet, but it was only to conceal the needle. He wasn't deaf, not very. For I heard him whistling, Oscar."

"Whistling?" Neville looked surprised "I don't see—"

"Neither did I until it was too late." Miss Withers admitted. "But did you ever see a blind man using tobacco?"

The Inspector nodded. He guessed what she meant.

"They seldom do, because they can't see the curling smoke. Same reason—a deaf man *couldn't* hear himself whistle. All through this affair, something has been bothering me, and it was that. I made a mess of things, and

you only saved my life by playing Sherlock Holmes and double-crossing me, Oscar."

Piper grinned. But Henry Neville looked very weary. The Inspector turned to him. "Well, you may rest easy now, my friend."

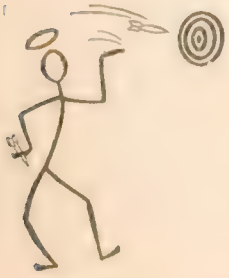
"Only because the show is over," confessed Neville. "There was no hushing up this second killing, even if it was to save a life. I've had to call off the last day of the show, and let the owners take their animals home. It's just as well. I'm going to take my own setters and go down to Maryland for a week's shooting. Anyway, the poisoning scare is nipped in the bud."

"In the flower, rather," said Miss Withers. The Inspector led the way toward the kennels, where at last there was a scene of bustling activity. They collected Dempsey, and crowded toward the doors amid a throng of dog fanciers, each with one or more precious bluebloods at the end of a leash.

"Poor old Dempsey was out of his class," Miss Withers remarked. It was not exactly true. At that moment the pugnacious little terrier jerked his leash from the hand of his mistress and threw himself upon the nearby champion Million-dollar Highboy, whom he set about whittling down to size.

They were dragged apart almost instantly, but Dempsey took his punishment without sadness, and capered cheerily homeward. He had bitten off about two thousand dollars worth of blue-ribbon dog flesh, and regained his self-respect.

NEXT MONTH —



THE SAINT NEVER TRIED TO BE A DETECTIVE, BUT EVERY SO OFTEN HE GOT STUCK WITH IT — AS HE DOES IN

THE ARROW OF GOD

A SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

— in the December issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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the case of the muted violin

by . . . Rufus King

Possibly the distant rumble of thunder made it inaudible: that note in the orchestration of the mise-en-scene which Dr. Colin Starr missed. It disturbed and puzzled him, the way it does when you feel the lack of some familiar thing and are unable to decide, with precision, just what it is. This was odd, because Starr was a man of precision; a large man, and compactly built, with a strength of feature which his elder patients found bafflingly ugly, but children never. He caught an oppressive menace in the thunder, distant but ponderable, as if there were a hidden power for some evil in it that surcharged the sultry air and set his nerves on edge.

The rough shale road continued high through Ohio's southeastern hills. It had left far behind it, down in Onega Valley, the river, and the town of Laurel Falls. Normally it was a pleasant road even in this heat of midsummer, and Starr had previously caught a peaceful, almost narcotic quality in its

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Rufus King, author of THE STEPS TO MURDER (several of the stories in which first appeared in this magazine), MALICE IN WONDERLAND, DUENNA TO A MURDER, THE CASE OF THE REDOUBLED CROSS, and other novels, has long been noted for his ability to explore the minds and the hearts of the criminally inclined. Some years back, Mr. King wrote a series of stories about Dr. Colin Starr; we will be reprinting several in the next months.

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loneliness; but now the thunder was sheeting across it like a shroud. He increased the speed of his big car through stands of white oak and between hedgerows where goldenrod was starting to glitter into bloom.

It was the seventh time Starr had traversed the road since Mrs. Vickgrove had acquired what it pleased her to consider a chest cold in the spring. It would have been simpler, of course, to have sent her as a charity patient to the State sanitarium; but she was no longer young, and Starr knew with what a vital longing she loved the worthless shack where she lived with her worthless husband, their eleven children, some very tough pullets and an annual pig.

It was the afternoon of Thursday, the 22nd of July. He was to remember the date vividly later on, both the date and the spot, and the enigmatic lacking of that once familiar note. Otherwise the Vickgroves' call held little importance with the tragedy that followed.

He attended to Mrs. Vickgrove while her brood clung to him, or stared at him from under a table, or around corners, or from beneath a trundle-bed. He admired the condition of Alice, the current pig. He agreed with Mr. Vickgrove that times were bad, and that the only attitude for a philosopher whose creed was that the world owed him a living was one of patient (and horizontal) waiting.

He left a good supply of the most nourishing things, and privately told her soiled and whiskered husband that he would turn him over to the county authorities if the bulk of the supplies didn't find their way, via her stomach, to Mrs. Vickgrove's ailing chest. It was a specious threat, but effective. Starr hadn't the slightest idea what exact authorities he could turn Mr. Vickgrove over to, even if he would.

Again, on the journey back along the rough shale road, Starr was disturbed by the missing note. He tried at some length to determine its nature, while the thunder of the storm drew nearer, but it was no use. The shale road merged with the Columbus Highway, and he turned the car onto cement toward Laurel Falls.

It was up a side-road, a mile before he reached the outskirts of the town, that he saw the blazing car.

Several motorists had stopped, and Starr drew up too. He took a chemical fire-extinguisher from its bracket and ran; but even before he joined the small group that fringed the blazing heat, he knew that no service could be done for the contorted body slumped to one side of the car. Then rain burst, lashing down in torrents, offering a protective sheet for a close enough approach to make the chemicals effective.

The local people there he knew; the others were a party of tourists from Michigan traveling east. The rain, the flare of lightning and the thunder, all made for a nervous confusion; but certain definitive things and one event impressed themselves in what then seemed an unrelated pattern on his mind.

The event was the arrival of the dead man's brother.

Starr had recognized the blazing car as one belonging to a Mr. John Reggert. He knew this about the man: his age was a general sixty. He had come to Laurel Falls with his younger brother Charles somewhat over a year back. Charles was his junior by eleven years, and consciously clung to the remnants of an already faded youth. Sharper opinion among the country-club members had grimly labeled Charles an embalmed Gibson Boy. Not that he wasn't well liked, for both of the brothers were; but it was felt that Charles should accept the inescapable, and both act and dress his age of forty-nine.

Then too, there was the question of Mary Delham.

Starr didn't know much about the Reggert brothers' past. Nobody did, beyond a casual understanding that Charles was an amateur bibliophile with a precious taste in formats, and that the elder John had owned a brokerage office in Boston from which he had sensibly retired on a large fortune.

It was especially sensible from the town's point of view that John had selected Laurel Falls as the spot where the retiring process could, with grace, mature. He had been drawn there (he said) because he and Charles had admired the section's beauty during a transcontinental motor-trip some years ago. He had bought a simple but charming estate just beyond the town's outskirts, a mile or so up the side-road on which his car was now a charred tomb. This was the old Delham estate, and the town took it for granted that that was how Mary Delham had come in.

About that, you would have to know.

Mary and her widowed mother, Mrs. Everett Everest Delham, were familiar cogs in the general debacle of the investment wheel. Mrs. Delham had done her best. She was a gracious, fragile woman, and had let it tacitly be understood among her intimates that no sacrifice was too great in her struggle to hold the Delham estate long enough to serve as a launching point for Mary into the security of a successful marriage. Security was her fetish, an attitude which Starr could understand when he thought of her stricken look when ruin had stared her in the face.

He could even understand her innate foolishness, which was that of an elderly, sheltered

belle whose repute as a once-famous beauty remained her sole mite. He knew that the purchase price given by John Reggert for the estate had only been a part in Mrs. Delham's decision for the sale. She had seen, in Charlie's eye, that look.

And there Starr had had no sympathy with her whatever. He had been fond of Mary Delham when she was a baby, and was still fond of her now that she was a lovely girl of nineteen. He had cursed, to himself, that assured wisdom with which a blindly loving parent can distort and maim the life of her child. For the child's own good! There was little that enraged him so acutely as this pinnacle of prescience on which the old, with their stomachs full of a lifetime of inept experience, were wont to sit.

Of course it was a good match from that pinnacled point of view: a decent, sober man, a kindly man whose money (it was generally known that Charles would be his brother's heir, as well as currently being the recipient of a stunning allowance) would shield Mary against the major and minor disasters and all the trivial irritations and despairs of a cruelly unstable world. The engagement had been announced the past spring, and the wedding was set for late September.

Starr had watched Mrs. Delham bloom, as if a great new force of blessed life were resurging through her veins. The years seemed to drop from her, and her hands were soft and lovely and very white again. She had moved with Mary into a smaller house in town, a thoroughly smart little house, and one with the better dower-touch.

Starr had watched Mary, too. She hadn't bloomed so well. She had said nothing, neither to him nor to anyone else; but he knew. He knew about young Jim Marvane. From Mrs. Delham's viewpoint no one could have been less acceptable as a son-in-law than Jim Marvane, financially, though she was perfectly willing to concede his breeding and charm. He had passed his bar examinations with honors the previous year, but his sole clients to date had remained in the will-drawing class.

Neither Mary nor Jim had quite reached the point, but it had been there, waiting, just wanting a definite word on either of their parts to start them clinging, or whatever it was (Starr didn't exactly know) that the younger generation went in for when they stunned themselves with the discovery that they were in love. It was a hopelessly patterned situation, of course. Starr saw that. Just as he so frequently saw that life was patterned with pitfalls into which the cold sublimity of common sense forced you to plunge.

Those things were in Starr's mind as he wondered whether the burned body in the car would not, no matter how tragically, solve Mary's problem. Then he found that it would not, because Charles Reggert drove up.

Tears were inseparable from rain on Charles' old-young face. He wore no hat, no coat to protect himself from the downpour. He seemed pathetically glad to see Starr there, reflecting in his own shocked face the respect and sense of utter dependence in which the Doctor was held by the other men in the group, which in turn were but a reflection of the community at large. It wasn't Starr's wealth which accounted for that, nor his high professional standing in the State. You had to go deeper: pierce the steel shell of formal dignity beneath which flowed an overwhelming modesty, and a nature so sentimentally kind that he was in a constant state of terror that somebody would find it out.

Charles had seen from the house (he said) the pillar of smoke just before the rain had started. He had felt a sudden foreboding of disaster, and had jumped into the station-wagon and driven down. He behaved very well. He agreed with the general consensus among the group as to how the accident must have taken place: the car had somehow got out of control, left the road, and crashed into the trunk of a tree. The impact had been sufficient to cause it to burst into flames, as such impacts sometimes will. John had been mercifully unconscious; otherwise he would have opened the door and escaped. John had been burned, and had died.

The coroner, the chief of police, some of his men, and District Attorney Hefferfield screamed up through the flaring lightning and the crashes of thunder. The coroner asked Starr to sit in. The case presented the familiar "geographical" outline of a death from fire: irregular patches produced by the flame, dependent upon the way in which it had reached the body. The burns on the head and wrists were of the fourth degree. The clothing in general was badly charred, except for the shoes, some parts of the trouser-legs and the driving-gloves. Starr agreed with the coroner that Reggert had probably died immediately of shock, caused by extensive injury to the surface nerves from flame.

The face was useless for purposes of identity, and Charles managed to suggest a star sapphire ring which his brother always wore. Starr helped the coroner carefully to remove the gloves. The star sapphire was there, all right, on the third finger of the left hand. Starr was interested in the freakishness which had spared both the hands from harm. He examined

them carefully and found no trace of injury whatever, even to the glossed polish of the nails, a polish which momentarily struck him as being incongruous with slight calluses that he felt on the fingertips of the left hand.

And that was how things stood late Thursday afternoon, on the 22nd of July.

An investigator for the Orion Assurance Company, Ltd., arrived by plane from Boston early the following morning. Starr was given a resume of the results by District Attorney Hefferfield during a twosome on the country-club links in the afternoon.

"Naturally," Hefferfield said, after socking a beauty straight down the first leg toward the seventh hole, "we suspected an insurance fraud just as strongly as the company did."

Starr (after socking his own ball the same) said: "Why?"

Clubs clashed faintly in bags, and they ambled over grass.

Hefferfield said: "Because the set-up is as old as the hills. Just think: the body of the insured was burned beyond recognition, and nothing but the familiar ring, some metal objects, and what was left of the clothing were there to establish his identity."

"I always thought the fraud was exposed through dental charts."

"It is. Only in this case, John Reggert had upper and lower plates, complete. He hadn't graced a dental chart for the past ten years. The man from the Orion people was upset about it. I could see how he would be, when you consider the amount involved."

"How much?"

"Half a million."

"What?"

"That's right, under the double indemnity. John knew that Charles had no business sense and wanted to leave him plenty of cash for his formats." Hefferfield turned to his caddy. "Give me a Number 2."

Starr waited until after the shot: then said: "Will they pay?"

"Oh, yes. The fingerprints clinched that. The insurance investigator took a set of them from the body and compared them with prints on any number of John Reggert's belongings up at the house. You know — silver-backed hair-brushes, the glass in the bathroom, a razor-blade: in fact, you've no idea the trouble he went to or the number of comparisons he made. There was nothing phony about them, either — none of this having been pressed there under duress or made by a dead hand. You can spot things like that; in fact they're exactly what the investigator was on the lookout for."

Starr sliced into the rough. Disturbingly a mental picture of the unburned driving-gloves

had come back to him, a sudden wonder as to why on earth John Reggert had been wearing gloves at all in the heat of that summer day.

He accepted Hefferfield's rude condolences on his unlucky slice, and said: "Look here, was there any doubt?"

"I've just been telling you. The fingerprints proved there couldn't have been; the corpse was John Reggert all right; and the investigator is advising the company to put the claim through."

"No, I don't mean that. I mean about the accident. Could it have been suicide or murder?"

"This time, Colin, none. Nothing of value turned up at the autopsy beyond a large-enough alcoholic content in the brain to account for Reggert's having crashed the car. To coin a phrase, the case is closed."

Starr was persistent.

"I've been thinking about the gloves he wore. Why gloves? The day was blistering. It makes you wonder if their purpose hadn't been to preserve the fingers so that the prints could be used to prove identity. Just as they have been."

Hefferfield thought it over.

"If you hadn't come along with that chemical extinguisher —oh, say about ten minutes more, and the gloves would have been cinders."

Starr absently selected a niblick.

"Charles Reggert's appearance on the scene was almost as timely as mine." He thought back carefully, and said: "He had a chemical extinguisher in the station-wagon, too."

The body of John Reggert was interred with impressive rites on Sunday afternoon. An Episcopalian service was held in the pleasant drawing-room of the old Delham home. The crush at the house was excessive, and Starr found himself wedged in between Mrs. Delham and Mary on definitely folding chairs. Even with all windows open, the mass of flowers thickly fogged the air.

An expensive choir had been imported from Columbus, complete with an electric organ; and Starr, while slowly suffocating, wondered at the to-do a body had to go through before it could find peace beneath the earth. He knew that John Reggert had had a distaste for music which had amounted almost to a phobia, and yet there Reggert lay, helpless beneath a magnificent blanket of lilies and white orchids, while the melancholy grandeur of "Rock of Ages," "Lead, Kindly Light," and a lengthy solo involving "The Lost Chord" (moaned by the choir's contralto) rolled in waves across his shell.

Charles Reggert had asked Starr to join Mrs. Delham, Mary, and himself in the car for

the drive to the cemetery. For a while only Mrs. Delham talked, saying the appropriate and senseless little things that convention seems to demand at funerals: the beauty and quantity of the floral offerings, the excellence of the music, the fact of Everyone having been there. Starr appreciated the anonymous value of such trivia as a bridge across such moments of social awkwardness and grief. Charles' statement toward the end of them dropped in the close atmosphere of the limousine's tonneau like a minor bombshell.

Charles said to Mary: "I wonder whether you would think it strange if I suggested that we didn't wait?"

"Wait? For what, Charles?"

"For September. No—please, dear, let me explain how I see it. I'd like you to understand how I feel."

Mrs. Delham was p l a i n l y shocked.

She said: "Really, Charles, even to discuss a marriage when — why, the very f u n e r a l, Charles — it isn't even *over* yet."

"I know." He turned the parody of a youngish, saddened smile on Starr. "I think that you would understand, Doctor."

"I'm afraid I don't, Mr. Reggert."

"I l o v e d my brother." He made the statement simply, and as though it explained everything. He saw from their expressions that it d i d n ' t, of course; so he added, while still clinging to the smile: "Surely you can see? His death leaves me empty. E x c e p t for you, Mary. We were unusually close, John and I; and his going is as though a part had been cut right out of me. Your lovely house, Mrs. Delham, our living here, all of those t h i n g s were of John's planning. I can't go back to them just by myself. Mary dear, I'm a desperately lonely man."

Starr couldn't watch Mary. He knew even without looking at her what her face would be like. He did, however, watch Mrs. Delham, reading the swift and d e c i s i v e series of her thoughts: Why not? Highly unconventional, but wealth had a habit of bursting such artificial bonds. Wealth—there was that half-million in insurance just alone. Naturally it could never be the sort of wedding she had planned: no magnificent spectacle at the church with the season's picked crop of debutantes for bridesmaids. No, something u t t e r l y quiet, with only the family and a handful of very intimate friends at the house.

Charles must have been reading her mind too, for he said: "I want to close the house and go away at once. I thought of a yachting cruise, perhaps in the South Atlantic. I thought you might come with us. Then later —well, we could come back to our home; or rightfully, to your

home, Mrs. Delham."

Starr always thought it was the yacht that did it, the yacht and this magnificent inclusion of herself as a member of the year's luxuriant honeymoon.

Mrs. Delham said tentatively: "Really, I—Just when did you think?"

"Next week."

"Next week—oh, surely—"

Charles repeated it more firmly: "Next week."

Mrs. Delham sighed. Her hand closed delicately over Mary's. She too said again: "Next week."

The wedding was set for Saturday afternoon . . .

The town had been scandalized since Monday morning when, via the backstairs grapevine, news of the wedding (so sudden on the heels of a hideous fraternal death) had gone the rounds.

The insurance claim was settled on Thursday.

And on Friday, the afternoon before the wedding-day, Starr started out again for the hills to call on Mrs. Vickgrove.

He felt bitterly depressed and bothered, and hated the thought of the coming day, which offered far too much of an ancient sacrificial touch for his liking. He thought of it as a human sacrifice in the strictest sense, and one that was even more cruel than a blood-letting on some pagan altar, for tomorrow the lamb would not die. The offering even lacked the grandeur of being made to omnipotent gods. He certainly refused to consider Mrs. Delham's gracious appetites and nostalgias for a cosseted past as such.

In spite of his darkling mood, the shale road up the rugged hills began to exert its soothing charm; and today there was no thunder (as there had been last week) to mar its lonesome harmonies. And because there was no thunder, he missed, and this time more decisively, that once familiar note — that muted something . . . Then it came to him suddenly—

Violin.

Always before today, and before that day last week, clear and thin in echo among the hills, from back a space off the shale road, back there a bit in the stand of white oaks, a hermit had sat before a rough cabin of logs and had played his violin. Habitually he had done so, during the few hours when the sun would be sinking down to the west.

Starr had stopped once and had gone in to see him: a gentle, kindly old visionary, very neat and clean-shaven, and with his hair carefully brushed and combed. Starr had automatically diagnosed a heart condition (for his own private information), and had suggested that the hermit go a little easy on the jug of corn which had been offered in hospitality. He had been greatly interested in the hermit's special psychosis,

which was a fixation that God was music, and a belief that if a cult could be formed which would embrace music as such, then the world would be a much better place to live in. Starr had had no argument with that, and he had gone away deeply impressed by the pure happiness of the harmlessly mad.

As he neared the path which led toward the cabin, Starr wondered whether something had happened to the old fellow, and a premonition increased that a sudden heart-attack might have proved his earlier diagnosis and have muted the hermit's violin. He stopped the car at the entrance to the path. It was cool and dim beneath the heavy stand of tall white oaks, and the lowering sun cast shadows right across the small clearing where the cabin stood. It was intensely quiet, and the cabin door was ajar.

Starr went inside, into heavy violet twilight, and sensed the emptiness of the s m a l l neat room. He accustomed his eyes to this deeper shade, and things grew clear: the same frugal orderliness which he had found before, a cot with its bedding folded, a small range, s o m e utensils, some essential china and glass, everything r i g h t, very clean.

And on a table a violin-case, and in the case, the violin.

The air was impressionable with a quantity of things which demanded to be sensed, and Starr caught it suddenly: *You do not desert your God.* Never (Starr knew this absolutely, as though the strings of it had spoken) would the friendly old codger have gone away and left his violin unless he had expected, shortly, to return. But on Thursday of last week he had not returned, for the violin had been still—on Thursday of last week when another old man had been charred to death by flame. . . . *Calluses*—but the body's fingerprints had proved — and they, among all other methods of identification, do not lie.

No (a surge of horror left Starr shaking), *fingerprints do not lie!*

Night had fallen when Starr reached the old Delham homestead in its landscaped setting on the outskirts of the town.

He had done, in the meanwhile, many things: He had been in conference with District Attorney Hefferfield, with the coroner, with the chief of police, and with the attendant at the mortuary where the flame-charred body had been brought for post-mortem. He had conducted a chemical analysis in his laboratory at home. He had got in touch with the manager of the Onega Opera House. He had sent Mary Delham, on impulse, two dozen red roses. He had completely i g n o r e d his late afternoon appointments, letting rich neuroses fall where they would. He had eaten no dinner.

He went up the shallow steps of the old columned porch and pressed a bell. He said to the witless-looking maid who opened the door: "Will you ask Mr. Reggert whether he will see me, please? I am Doctor Starr."

He waited quietly in the dim entrance hall with all of its intricate excesses of an era gone past, and which the Reggert brothers had left unchanged. The maid returned, and he followed her listless gait into what in old Everett Delham's time had been a den. Its correct masculinity and complete discomforts were also still the same: very red leather, and mission, and oak, with trophied—and weaponed—walls, a brass clock that had once struck the hour nautically in bells, a barometer that no longer foretold, and a musty air of stale tobacco which even large windows opened onto a garden could not eradicate.

Charles Reggert was earnestly cordial. A black velvet smoking-jacket accented the massaged whiteness of his sedulously preserved face, with its wide-spaced grave gray eyes.

He said: "Delighted to see you, Doctor. Join me here by the window. There's an agreeable breeze tonight.—*A liqueur?* Or some whisky?"

"No, thank you."

"Something long in gin for the heat? A cigar?"

"Nothing, thank you, Mr. Reggert."

They sat on rigid leather.

Reggert assumed his youthful smile and said pleasantly: "Well?"

Starr looked through an open window at dark shrubbery against a starlit sky, at the patterned blacks of an old-fashioned garden whose stillness was broken by innumerable small noises from insects of the night.

He said, after a while: "My mission is a grave one, Mr. Reggert."

"Really, Doctor? How?"

"It deals with murder."

Reggert placed his highball glass slowly down on a tabouret. He carefully removed an ash from the end of his cigar. He stood up. His engaging smile remained quite bright.

"M---der? Well, that's an odd thing. Sure you won't join me?"

"Quite sure, thank you."

Reggert went over to a tantalus that stood on a desk in a farther corner. Starr sat patiently still and continued to observe the night. He heard faintly from behind him what might have been the swift opening and shutting of a drawer. He thought: "I may be a fool to gamble like this. He's getting a gun, all right. If I'm wrong in my estimate of him, I'll be housing a bullet within the next quarter of an hour. I'd better light the cigarette now. Reggert's cigar is good for another half-hour at least,

and that's a break."

He took a cigarette from his case and lighted it; then Reggert was back with a carafe in his hand, and splashing a good bit of whisky into the highball glass. Starr saw, before Reggert sat down again, that the right-hand pocket of the velvet smoking-jacket sagged.

"Now then, Doctor: Murder?"

"Yes. You know the fondness that I have for Mary and for her mother. Frankly, Mr. Reggert, I want you to set my mind at rest."

"This is very disturbing, very puzzling. At rest in just what way?"

"I want to be sure, Mr. Reggert, that Mary will not marry a murderer."

Charles drew his breath in sharply; and then, amazingly, there was his smile again, a little stiff, not quite successful, but nevertheless grimaced on his lips.

He said: "I see. You think I murdered John. You don't think it was an accident. I suppose you're not alone in this? There has been gossip?"

"As you say, there has been talk."

"And you've come to me to—reassure you? To erase that hideous suspicion?"

"I have."

"Just how can I do so, Doctor?"

"There are a few points that have occurred."

"Yes?"

"May I depend on your answering them frankly, on your realizing that it's not impertinent curiosity but a compelling interest in Mary's welfare?"

"Naturally. You can't imagine I'd permit such a vicious rumor to go unchallenged?"

"Let us start with Wednesday of last week."

"Why? John died on Thursday afternoon."

"I think you will see, Mr. Reggert. You keep a staff here of a gardener, a combination chauffeur-and-butler, and a combination housemaid-and-cook."

Charles' grave gray eyes contracted slightly.

"Yes. John believed in living simply. I suppose it does seem understaffed, but whenever we entertained, we did so at the country-club or in town."

"None of the three servants has quarters here?"

"That's right." Charles looked at his watch. "I imagine that the chauffeur is driving the maid home now. Just what's the point, Doctor?"

"There was no servant here after, say, eight o'clock on Wednesday night of last week?"

"No. There never is."

"I took the liberty this afternoon of going to the home of your maid. Her mother tells me that Ellen felt slightly ill on that Wednesday night, a

mild headache, and cramps—perhaps from something that had got into her food."

"Yes, I remember."

"Your brother kindly insisted that she stay at home until she felt better. He insisted that she stay at her home all the next day, which was Thursday, and not return here until Friday morning. At least, so her mother told me."

Charles gently placed the cigar on an ash-tray. His fingers, a little rigid, hung close to the right-hand pocket of the velvet smoking-jacket. Starr's own hand, with the lighted cigarette, moved slightly nearer to the open window.

Charles said: "That's perfectly true. It all strikes me as straining at a gnat."

"Here's the point, Mr. Reggert. From eight o'clock on Wednesday night until Friday morning, by which time the house had been taken over by the insurance investigator and the police, only the chauffeur-butler came inside here. On Thursday morning, when he reported that Ellen was still ill, your brother told him not to bother either with meals or with the house, that your brother and you would be dining in town."

"Must you belabor, Doctor?"

"I simply want to establish that no dusting or cleaning was done in here from early Wednesday night until Friday morning, when the insurance investigator made his fingerprint comparisons which established the identity of the corpse."

The word seemed to strike Charles as indelicate.

"After all, Doctor — my brother —"

"Your brother, Mr. Reggert, will undoubtedly be located and apprehended after I turn my conclusions over to District Attorney Hefferfield. That is, of course, unless you can dispel them."

Charles' voice was as gentle as escaping steam.

"This is madness, Doctor."

Starr's hand moved from the arm of his chair to the window-sill. Its fingers held the cigarette-tip glowing against the night.

"No, not madness. Simply a clear-headed, clever insurance fraud and murder. The recent Philadelphia mass poison atrocities were crude child's-play in comparison with it. Here is what I believe you did, Mr. Reggert."

"What *I* did—" Charles caught himself abruptly. His face suffused to an ugly liver color, and he said viciously: "I can't throw you out physically. I don't want to. I want to hear exactly what you think. Then I'll know what to do, Doctor."

"You, or rather your brother, as you prefer it, had plenty of time during the past year to select an appropriate victim. He explored, at leisure, the

lonely squatters, the vagrants, the isolated solitaries of our hills, until he found one suitable to his purpose."

The fingers of Charles' right hand were very stiff by now.

"I'm listening, Doctor."

"He hit upon the gentlest, the most trusting of all those lonesome souls, one whose patent frailty held him to the living by little stronger than a thread. Music was the old fellow's God. He asked for nothing but to be left in peace to play his violin to the setting sun. Your brother presented himself as one sympathetic, and offered with his wealth to launch a cult. So the hermit came down here on Wednesday night to discuss matters as an honored guest, a friend. Your brother's rooms, his accustomed places in the house, all of your brother's things, were carefully cleaned of your brother's fingerprints. So he installed the hermit overnight among them." Starr's voice now was as quiet, as dispassionate as the night. "That is why, Mr. Reggert, from the thorough naturalness with which the fingerprints were placed, they were accepted as belonging without question to the corpse, and it was accepted as y o u r brother's body."

"You have—more, Doctor?"

"A little thing: To me it seems the cruelest, the most cold-blooded thing of all. The fact that after the sapphire ring had been put on his hand, and before they were covered with that pair of fireproofed gloves, either you or your brother polished the old hermit's nails."

Charles' hand was inside the pocket.

"You have, I suppose, some p r e s u m e d basis for these libels?"

"The fingerprints of the body in the coffin will compare, Mr. Reggert, with those on the hermit's violin."

"Violin?"

"Yes. It was in his cabin. I had found it muted twice. It spoke to me this afternoon."

"I said this was madness."

"Perhaps. It made me remember two negligent things: One was that your brother hated music. The other was that the fingers of the left hand of the body in the car were slightly calloused on their tips. That is a condition known as 'violin fingers' to anyone versed in the identification of mutilated bodies, a literal trademark of a trade." Even the insects of the night seemed stilled as Starr added: "It was as though the hermit were telling me just what had happened, Mr. Reggert, through the medium of his violin—from the dead."

"You will be hearing it again very shortly, Doctor."

The gun was out: a snub-nosed, vicious-looking .32, and held in Charles' livid hand with a deadly aim. Starr swiftly

flicked the glowing cigarette-butt in an arc through the dark, quiet night. He repeated, very softly: "From the dead."

And then it came.

Thin, clear, coming in from the old-fashioned garden, but it seemed from far farther than the garden, from beyond that edge which we think of as the world, came the playing of a violin. . . . Shock prints queer patterns on the face, and Starr observed with interest what it did to Charles—then reached across and gently took the revolver from his hand.

"Was it you or your brother who recognized the probability of a heart condition, Mr. Reggert? Which one of you *induced him to drink enough liquor to bring on a fatal attack?*"

The music swelled, then slid vividly into harmonics, while sweat broke on Charles' tortured face.

"Make him stop—make him *go back!* . . . It was I who found out his heart was weak—he had a slight attack one afternoon when I was out there laying the ground. But John urged him to drink the liquor too—I wasn't alone in that—what difference does it make—why does it matter now—"

Starr's voice was grim:

"It matters a good deal to the State, Mr. Reggert. Your confession has been witnessed and recorded by men placed in the shrubbery outside this window. The exact method by which the hermit was killed was the one fact which it was still essential for them to know."

But there was a pleasant ending. Not for Charles Reggert, who was given life imprisonment; nor was it pleasant for his brother, who futilely fought extradition from Massachusetts before getting a similar term.

It was pleasant for Mrs. Delham.

She had always known that young Jim Marvane would make good. It was kind, of course, of Dr. Starr to have persuaded District Attorney Hefferfield both to take James on his staff, and to launch James on his career by giving him the prosecution of those Reggerts—but there had always been an indicative *Some*thing which she had been aware of in the boy *himself*. If, as she said to Starr at the wedding, Starr knew what she meant.

Starr did.

As Others See Us . . .

Now at long long last even I have succumbed to the financial lures of Television, and I have surrendered the Saint to its machinery in return for purely sordid inducements which will at least keep me in caviar through my declining years. As I write this, filming is about to begin in England, and by the time you read it the first episodes may already be flickering weekly across your home screens.

Inevitably the casting will again provoke wails from devoted readers; but I have no control over it, so please don't wail to me. And I must admit that it has never been easy for a producer, for the Saint is probably the most difficult of all characters to cast, and the very few actors who could have played it as I see it are now either departed or too old or much too expensive for a TV series.

But at least I have been allowed to read the scripts, and I have been most pleasantly surprised to see how closely they have tried to follow the original stories and preserve the original personality of the Saint, at least in the writing. I discovered the reason for this when I was shown a long briefing essay prepared by the script supervisor, Harry W. Junkin, and one of the producers, Robert S. Baker. I thought it was such an excellent, sympathetic, and perceptive analysis of Simon Templar that I asked for permission to reprint it here. I believe it will interest you to see how these things are done, and to realize what a sincere effort was made to achieve faithful adaptations. This is something I can most honestly appreciate.

Thank you, Harry and Bob.

Leslie Charteris

the saint: instructions to writers

by . . . Harry W. Junkin and Robert S. Baker

In all Mr. Charteris' books the character of Simon Templar, "The Saint", has been drawn several times larger than life. No real man could possibly develop such a vast combination of talents, such brilliance, charm, wit, urbanity, physical strength and sex appeal. Nevertheless it is this very **excess of qualities** which has made this character enormously popular all over the world. The Saint's flavour and character, then, must remain as Mr. Charteris has etched them and in general the stories should be followed as closely as production problems will permit.

Perhaps the best way to acquaint writers on this series with "The Saint's" character is to list some representative quotations from the various books:

". . . It is true that these buccaneering raids of his which had earned him the sub-t i t l e of 'The Robin Hood of M o d e r n Crime' were invariably undertaken against the property, and occasionally the persons, of citizens who by no stretch of the imagination could have been called desirable; but the law took no official cognisance of such small details, The Law, in the S a i n t's opinion, was a stodgy and elephantine institution which was chiefly justified in its existence by the pleasantly musical explosive n o i s e s which it made when he broke it . . ."

". . . 'Don't ever get one thing wrong,' the S a i n t said. 'I never robbed anyone who wasn't a thief or a blackguard, although they might have been c l e v e r enough to stay within the law. I've killed people too, but never anyone that the world wasn't a better place without.' . . ."

". . . My name stands for a kind of justice."

Writers are cautioned to remember that the Saint fights **technicalities** in the law. Regardless of how situations are handled in actual stories, the Saint must **never** be portrayed as actively contemptuous of "The Law" or "Justice". He may consider individual policemen stupid—but never the system itself. Never have the Saint commit crime without an altruistic motive—**elaborate** on:—

". . . S i m o n T e m p l a r brought to the solemn business of enjoying himself the same gay zest and inspired impetuosity w h i c h he brought to his battles with the technicalities of the law . . ."

Be very careful of scenes where the Saint is bawling out **policemen.** These should be **softened for** television.

". . . Quercy gazed across his littered desk into the dancing blue eyes u n d e r quizzically tilted brows . . . The sight of the tall broad-shouldered figure sprawled with such impudent grace in his s h a b b y armchair made a mockery of the conventional stiffness of the room, just as the casual elegance of its clothing affronted the hard-worn dilapidation of the furniture. The warm bronze of the p r e posterously handsome face seemed to bring its own sun into the d i n g y room . . ."

". . . For the saga of any adventurer take this: an idea, a scheme, action, danger, escape, and perhaps a surprise somewhere. Repeat indefinitely, with irregular interludes of quiet. Flavour it with the eternal discontent of unattainable horizons, and the everlasting content of an eagle's freedom. T h a t had been Simon Templar's life since the day when he was first nicknamed the Saint; and it was his one prayer that he might be spared many years more in which to demonstrate t h e peculiar brand of saintliness which he had made his own . . ."

As you rightly surmise, by now, the Saint bitterly resents injustice of any kind, especially injustice against people who can not fight back.

He never "wastes energy on vain regrets". He even has a "humorous fatalism about his own errors". He has a sharp sense of humour and appreciates a joke. He is invariably immaculately dressed and impeccably tailored. After a fight—the first thing the Saint does is to adjust his beautifully knotted tie and flick the dust from his flawlessly pressed suit.

The Saint is to be portrayed on television as "Middle Atlantic" which means that he is neither an Englishman nor an American.

Keep in mind that there is sometimes a vast difference between dialogue written to be read and dialogue written to be acted but try to use as much of Mr. Charteris' dialogue as possible. Some of it is very good indeed.

Edit typically English expressions—"Old chap" and "perfectly smashing party", etc.

". . . The Saint being a man of decidedly l u x u r i o u s tastes, was the tenant of a flat on Brook Street, Mayfair, which was so far beyond his means that he had long since given up worrying about the imminence of bankruptcy."

In the foreword to the first Saint Omnibus he writes:

". . . If his origin, his early life, the circumstances of his youth, seem to be shrouded in mystery it is not because I am wilfully trying to hide anything, but simply because I don't know . . ."

"The same thing applies to his relationships with women, of whom there have been quite a few. No one would want to deny that he has his human weaknesses in that direction, and at the same time that he has less than the ordinary human burden of repressions."

The Saint is a gourmet and knows a great deal about food and national dishes all over the world. He knows when Cape Cod oysters are at their best and what months of the year Casaba melons are the most succulent.

He is also an authority on wine which he drinks moderately.

"I take this wine, and to me it's much more than alcoholic grape juice. I think of the particular breed of grapes it was made from, and the dry, sunny slopes where they ripened."

Writers are cautioned against having the Saint drink in a scene unless the dramatic action legitimately requires it. This also applies to smoking.

His dialogue is articulate, crisp, literate and humorous. His approach is light, deft, swift. He can be tough as steel or as delicate as a watch spring.

He is invariably polite to waiters, porters, cab drivers if they serve him efficiently.

He is deeply, almost tenderly fond of Hoppy Uniatz and has a great capacity for loyal friendship.

". . . For Simon Templar was the incalculable outlaw for whom the routines of criminal investigation had no precedents. He belonged to no watertight classification, followed no rules but his own, fitted into no definite category and in the official scheme of things. He was the Saint: a creation of his own, comparable to nothing but himself . . ."

His age, for the purpose of this series, is thirty-three.

He is an expert at Judo. He carries a gun but never shoots a man unless he, himself, is in danger. He never actually starts a fight himself, but he defends himself with lethal efficiency if he is attacked.

Writers should check with the Producer all sequences which involve knives and knife throwing.

Where single speeches in stories run in excess of five lines —these should be broken up.

the gentle murderer

by . . . Philip Ketchum

After his sad and unfortunate experiences in Pleasant Valley, Arthur Boardman took a long trip. He traveled by bus, by train, then he walked, and walked. One afternoon he stopped at a farmhouse to ask for a drink of water. The woman who answered the door was middle-aged, chunky, unattractive, but she did have a nice smile and she didn't drive him away. She didn't seem frightened. She did not call for her husband.

This was an encouragement to Arthur. He mopped his face. "It's been a terribly hot day."

She motioned toward the side. "Why don't you rest there for a time, under the shade. It will be cooler in the evening."

"You won't mind?"

"Of course not."

"Then I think I will," Arthur said. "It seems as though I have walked for ages."

She had pointed to a place under the trees where there were several chairs, a table, and an outside grill. Arthur sighed. The grill indicated there must be a husband somewhere around. He didn't get along with husbands. Or dogs. But he

Philip Ketchum, Cornell Woolrich and Richard Sale were the lead names in the old Black Mask days. Twenty years later, Ketchum, who since then has written innumerable novels including RENEGADE RANGE (Monarch), TRAITOR GUNS (Avon), THE STALKERS (Berkeley), returns to this field with the present story of the sensitive Mr. Arthur Boardman.

hadn't seen a husband or a dog so he waited.

In about half an hour a different woman came out to see him. She was carrying a tray. On it was a sandwich, a glass and a pitcher. She was middle-aged but thin. She looked tired, nervous. She said, "Aunt Hilda asked me to bring this. Are you looking for work?"

Arthur nodded. "Yes, I am looking for work. But I'm not sure—"

"Aunt Hilda said you didn't look like a tramp."

"Is Aunt Hilda the woman who came to the door when I knocked."

"Yes."

"Then her husband—"

"He is dead."

"Your hired man—"

"We have no hired man. But we need one. The chores are too much for us."

Arthur smiled. He tasted the sandwich. It was good. He tried the liquid in the pitcher. Lemonade. It was good. He looked around. The house, the barn, the yard, the fields—these looked good. There was no husband, no hired man, apparently no dog — just two women alone. This place was very much like the one in Pleasant Valley, but here things might be nicer.

"Could I plant a flower garden?" he asked.

The woman nodded. "I think Aunt Hilda would like that."

"Then I will think about staying," Arthur said.

The next month was very fine. Arthur kept busy from morning until night. He worked in the fields, strengthened the fences, milked the cow, cleaned out the weeds creeping into the front yard. He also found time to mark out his flower garden, started working the ground. He put out some rose bushes, geraniums, z i n n i a s, marigolds, dahlias. But this was just a beginning. He loved flowers.

Aunt Hilda seemed to appreciate his interest in the flower garden. Miss Simpson did, and didn't. Miss Simpson was the thin woman, companion to Aunt Hilda. Actually, she was more tired and nervous than Arthur had thought. In fact, she was a most unhappy person, o f t e n complaining, whining.

Several p e o p l e stopped by during this period. One was Henry Culp. He lived in town, was a barber. A gaunt, skinny man, stooped, maybe fifty, a widower. He was interested in Aunt Hilda, or maybe he was interested in her farm. He came out to see her every Saturday. He didn't like the f l o w e r garden.

Another man who stopped by was Tom Salter, a neighbor. He had the adjoining farm. He was a gruff, scowling man, bearded, not too clean. He wanted to buy a part of Aunt Hilda's land. He thought a flower garden was silly. He had a wife n a m e d Mary. Arthur hadn't met her but he saw her from a distance

several times. He was sure she was nicer than her husband.

The sheriff, Frank Oldring, dropped in one afternoon. He drank some of Aunt Hilda's lemonade and he looked sharply at Arthur, but he didn't ask any questions.

Another month passed. It was a very nice month. That is, most of it was nice. Now and then, of course, Miss Simpson's complaining annoyed him. It seemed nothing was right for her. She couldn't s l e e p. She had pains in her stomach, pains in her head. She was tired all the time. It was Fall and it was cold sometimes and she didn't like the cold. One afternoon she interrupted his work in the barn to list all that was bothering her.

Arthur sighed. He turned to look at her. "Is it really as bad as that?"

"It is worse," Miss Simpson answered. "I haven't told you half the things that hurt me. I just wish—sometimes I wish I were dead."

"Aunt Hilda would miss you."

"I doubt it. Aunt Hilda does not really like me. She puts up with me."

Arthur frowned thoughtfully. "Maybe I could help you."

"I d o n ' t know how you could."

"I'll have to show you. Will you come with me?"

"Where?"

"To my room."

Miss Simpson looked startled. Her cheeks turned pink. "To—to your room, Arthur? But—"

He shook his head. "Don't be f o o l i s h. We are grown up people, middle-aged. There is nothing to worry about."

"But to go to a m a n ' s room—"

"No one will know. My room is behind the barn. It can't be seen from the house or from the road."

"But Arthur—"

He took her arm f i r m l y. "Come on, Miss Simpson."

She died hard, struggling under a smothering pillow. She twisted, turned, tried to get free, probably because she did not fully understand what was happening. As Arthur held the pillow across her face he explained but possibly she didn't listen.

"Don't fight it, Miss Simpson," Arthur said. "This is what you really want. It is peace. It is freedom from pain and suffering. It is an everlasting sleep. It will take care of all the problems which have been bothering you. Don't fight it anymore."

Finally, she didn't. Finally her body s t o p p e d twitching, stopped b r e a t h i n g. She lay motionless. Arthur put the pillow away. He looked down at her sadly. But then he smiled. Really, what he had done was a kindness. Alive, she had been miserable.

He r e a c h e d to touch her shoulder, and said, "Miss Simp-

son, I think I will put you under the rhododendrons at the back edge of the flower garden. You would like that I am sure. Next year the blossoms should be beautiful."

It was unfortunate but Aunt Hilda didn't like it when Miss Simpson failed to show up for supper. Then, as it grew dark, she became alarmed. She searched the house. With Arthur's help they searched the barn. They even went down to the creek calling Miss Simpson's name. By this time Aunt Hilda wanted to send for the sheriff.

"No, I wouldn't do that," Arthur said. "Miss Simpson might not be lost."

"She could have gone to see one of the neighbors," Aunt Hilda admitted. "But she should have told me."

"People are forgetful," Arthur said.

By the next day, however, Miss Simpson hadn't appeared. The sheriff was summoned, a search was organized. But it accomplished nothing. They found no trace of the woman. The sheriff, weary and frustrated, stopped to see Arthur who was working in the flower garden.

"This woman, Miss Simpson, she was a strange one," the sheriff said. "I suppose she just wandered off and kept going."

"She was very unhappy," Arthur said.

The sheriff pointed. "What you planting?"

"Rhododendron plants."

"Never liked 'em," the sheriff said. "Could you run this place yourself?"

Arthur nodded. "If I had to."

"Then try to talk Aunt Hilda into visiting her brother in California. She's in there, crying about Miss Simpson. Do her good to have a change."

"I'll talk to her," Arthur said.

He went in to see her but she was too weepy to listen. She was still crying the next morning and for the next three days she moped around as though she was in a daze. Saturday she wouldn't admit Henry Culp. She sent him away. Sunday she did not go out at all. Monday she stayed in bed.

Arthur did the necessary chores but he was absent-minded about his work. He felt terribly bad. He hadn't realized Aunt Hilda would feel desolate without Miss Simpson. There was one thing he could do to help her, but he didn't want to. He had grown rather fond of Aunt Hilda.

Puzzling this over one night he was interrupted by a visitor, Henry Culp. His thin face was lined with worry. His eyes were red. He had been drinking.

"How is she?" Henry asked.

Arthur shrugged. "She's all right. Misses Miss Simpson. Nothing to do about that."

"But there is something to be

done. I can move in with her—look after her."

"Don't think she'd want that."

"She'll get used to it. Thing to do is be firm, forceful, commanding. I let her send me away Saturday night but that was a mistake. I'm going in to see her now."

"Wish you wouldn't."

Henry Culp drew a bottle of whiskey from his pocket. He took a drink, shuddered at the taste but then straightened and nodded definitely. "Now and then a man's got to be a man. I'll show her."

Arthur was frowning. Saturday night Aunt Hilda had sent Henry away. But he was back. Aunt Hilda had told Arthur once that she disliked whiskey. Henry smelled like a brewery. It wasn't right to let him bother the woman.

"I'll go with you," Arthur said. "It's very dark outside."

He motioned to the door. Henry turned that way. Arthur followed, but as he passed the wood box he picked up a thick chunk of stove wood. Carrying this he trailed Henry toward the house but near the flower garden he used it, whipping it up, bringing it down on Henry's skull. He swung hard. Henry died without uttering a sound.

Arthur looked down at him, shrugged, then said, "Henry, you shouldn't have come here. It isn't nice to force yourself on a woman. Of course, now you won't. I think I'll put you under the petunia bed. It's better than you deserved."

Undoubtedly, someone must have missed Henry Culp. Maybe a few of his customers. But barbers come and barbers go. The disappearance of one more didn't create much interest. In fact no one bothered Aunt Hilda about him. No one bothered Arthur.

But things weren't going too well. Hilda got out of bed, but with no spirit. She dragged around the day. She cried a great deal. Arthur encouraged her to visit her brother in California, but she didn't seem to want to go that far. She prayed that Miss Simpson would come home. Then, amazingly, and inconsistently, she said she wished Henry Culp would come to visit her.

"You mean the barber?" Arthur gasped.

"He was always nice to me," Aunt Hilda said. "Maybe he was after my money, but he was so pleasant about it."

"I don't think he's with us anymore," Arthur said.

"But I need him."

Arthur couldn't think what to say. As he hesitated, Aunt Hilda started crying again. She really cried and she kept crying.

There was a knock on the door. Arthur answered it. He was pleased to see Mary Salter on the porch. For two reasons

he was glad to see her. First, she was young and pretty. Second, she might be able to comfort Aunt Hilda. Arthur got upset when women cried.

It was midafternoon. He left the two women together, did a few chores, kept busy outside, but was right there when Mary was ready to go.

"I think Aunt Hilda feels better," Mary said. "Now I must hurry home."

"I'll walk with you," Arthur said.

She smiled but shook her head. "That isn't necessary."

"But I'd like to."

This time she frowned. "No, that wouldn't be wise. My husband is a very jealous man. Goodnight, Arthur."

She walked on. Arthur didn't follow her. After she was out of sight he turned back into the house to see Aunt Hilda. She was still sniffling, on the border of tears, but she said, "Arthur, it was nice Mary could come but I couldn't give her the encouragement she needs. Poor girl. I'm so sorry for her."

He raised his head. "Why?"

"Didn't you know about her husband? He beats her—actually beats her. She showed me her back, welts as thick as my finger. Some were bleeding. Tom Salter is a beast."

Arthur made a growling sound in his throat. He thought of how pretty Mary was. He remembered her husband, gruff, scowling, bearded. He never had liked him. Now, very abruptly, he hated him.

Aunt Hilda spoke. "Arthur, I wish you'd find Henry Culp. I was cruel to him. I sent him away."

"I think I know where he is," Arthur said.

She leaned toward him. "Arthur, you are a wonderful man."

He turned away but then stopped and looked back and said, "Aunt Hilda, can you be patient for several days? There is something else I must do first."

"I can wait, Arthur."

"I must buy some sweet williams for the flower garden. And you like verbenas, don't you?"

"Arthur, this is no time to think of the flower garden."

He smiled. "It's part of my life, Aunt Hilda. I have always loved flowers."

Arthur waited until late the next afternoon, then he headed for the creek below Tom Salter's land. That was where Tom pastured his cows. He would come after them before dusk. This was his habit.

It was an hour before dark when he got there, and he glared at Arthur. "What are you doing here?"

"Came to see you," Arthur said. "Found something in our barn. Didn't get too close to it. Could you—could you tell from the smell if it was a body?"

Tom gasped. "The body of Miss Simpson!"

"Didn't get too close. My stomach—"

"You've got no guts," Tom said. "Knew it all the time. Come on, I'll take a look at what's there then we'll call the sheriff."

The quickest way to Aunt Hilda's barn was down the creek, most of the way. Eventually they cut in toward the barn, but there wasn't much chance anyone saw them.

"Where is this body you found?" Tom asked.

"Up in the loft, under the hay."

"We looked there but maybe we didn't look far enough," Tom said. "Come on. Get a lantern."

"I'll carry the lantern," Arthur said. "You take a look at what's—what's there."

He got the lantern, lit it, pointed to the loft above. It was an open loft, no protecting rail across it. Tom led the way. Arthur followed. When they got there Tom peered into the murky shadows. He sniffed, then sniffed again.

"Hold the lantern higher," he ordered. "Don't see anything yet, don't smell anything."

"It's over there," Arthur said.

He made a sweeping motion with his arm. He reached out, hit Tom Salter at about the chest, hurled him backwards. There was nothing the man could fall against. He plunged down to the floor of the barn. On the way he gave a startled cry, but it wasn't loud.

Arthur hurried down. He knelt at Tom's side. He was afraid he might have to help Tom to the other side but that wasn't necessary. The fall had killed him.

He got up, stepped aside, then looked down at the man's body. When he did something like this he always felt sad. It was regrettable there was so much evil in the world. Tom Salter had eminently deserved to die but Arthur was still sorry. "I will do my best for you," he said slowly. "That is why I bought the sweet william seeds. Tonight, after dark, I will move you to the flower garden."

Aunt Hilda didn't cry at the supper table that night. She even seemed cheerful. This was encouraging to Arthur. He couldn't stand it if people were not happy. The next three days passed quietly. Mary came by to see Aunt Hilda. She didn't stay long and she seemed worried. She mentioned that Tom was away on some trip. This meant she had to do all the chores herself.

"Tom Salter does things like that," Aunt Hilda said that night. "Once he went to Chicago on a drunken binge. He was gone ten days. Another time he was gone two weeks."

"Maybe, this time, he won't

return," Arthur suggested.

"He'll come back," Aunt Hilda said. "Those who are no good always come back. Now Henry Culp isn't like that. Have you found him? Do you think—"

"Been too busy to do anything," Arthur said.

Her lips tightened. "But I want him, Arthur. I told you that."

"I know."

She started sniffling, then in a moment was crying.

Arthur left, went out to his room. He hoped that by morning Aunt Hilda would feel better. Sadly, she didn't. She was weepy at breakfast, shaky. Her eyes were swollen, red lined. Probably she hadn't slept well.

She started at him right away. "Arthur, what am I going to do? You said you knew where Henry was."

He was silent — and disappointed. It was impossible to understand her stubborn interest in Henry Culp.

"Arthur," she said, and she stretched out her hands. "Arthur, where is he? Why hasn't Henry come back?"

"I'm not sure he can," Arthur said frowning.

"Then I want to go to him. Arthur, life isn't worth living if I don't find him."

He looked away. "You really mean that?"

"Yes. Oh, yes."

He got up, suddenly feeling very weary. He nodded and said, "All right, Aunt Hilda. Wait here for a moment."

He went to the barn. There he had prepared a paste made of bacon grease and cyanide. This was for the rats. Fortunately he had preserved some of the cyanide.

He returned to the kitchen mixed the cyanide with a small amount of syrup, then took the drink to Aunt Hilda.

She hesitated. "What's that?"

"Just a tonic," Arthur replied. "It will help you along the journey you must take. Before the day is over, you and Henry will be together."

Her eyes brightened. "Arthur, you are so wonderful."

She gulped the drink. Arthur had been generous with the cyanide. It acted almost instantly. But she did struggle briefly, arching her body, gagging, making ugly sounds.

Arthur tried not to listen. He didn't watch her die. Instead he turned to the window, looked out at his flower garden, and smiled. The verbena bed he was preparing was right next to the petunias. It was below the petunias that he had buried Henry. If he put Aunt Hilda under the verbenas she would be lying right next to Henry. This was what she had wanted.

The next day Arthur went to town to see the sheriff. He explained Aunt Hilda had gone to California, to see her brother. This, actually, had been the sheriff's suggestion, and the

sheriff nodded approvingly.

"She may stay a month or so, or she may stay longer," Arthur said.

"That's all right," the sheriff said. "Wish I could go to California myself."

He seemed very friendly. Arthur was pleased. Everything in the world was beautiful. In the days ahead he would have the ranch to himself—or if he got lonely, he could drop in to see Mary Salter. A wonderful girl, Mary. Attractive, understanding—and available.

He did drop in to see her—but he wished he hadn't. She was in tears—uncontrollable tears. Her husband was still gone. She was afraid he might never come home.

"But he neglected you," Arthur said.

She nodded, sniffed. "I know."

"He has deserted you before."

Another nod.

"He beat you."

She sniffed again, wiped her eyes. "I know—but I love him."

"You can't love him," Arthur said.

"But I do, I do, I do," Mary cried. And then the tears really started.

Arthur escaped quickly. He couldn't stand tears. And he couldn't understand Mary Salter. What she had just told him wasn't true, could not be true. No woman could have loved a man like Tom Salter.

Several more days passed. Arthur worried about Mary. He went to see her again, hoping her attitude might have changed. It had. She was even more depressed. Tired, haggard, careless about her appearance, almost old. Lines had crept into her face. Deep shadows were below her eyes. The house looked as though it hadn't been cleaned for days.

"Mary——" Arthur said.

She shook her head. "I don't want to see you. I am afraid something has happened to Tom. Something terrible."

Arthur looked away — shuddered. He said, "Mary, I can help you."

"No thanks," Mary said. "I've sent for the sheriff. He ought to be here any minute now."

"What can the sheriff do?"

"Hunt for his—his body."

"But he deserted you."

'No. He took no money, none of his clothing. He disappeared just as Miss Simpson did."

"She wandered away somewhere."

"Tom didn't. I—I think he's been murdered—buried somewhere. I have that feeling—inside."

Arthur was silent for a moment. There was no accounting for the feelings a woman might get. There was no way to explain the way they acted. It occurred to him that if he worked quickly he might be able to put Mary with her husband, in the flower garden. But certainly she would be missed. Everyone around would be ques-

tioned. That included him—and he didn't want to be questioned.

In fact, the situation was even more serious. He could see the buildup in the future. Tom was missing. Miss Simpson had disappeared. Henry Culp, who had liked Aunt Hilda, was gone. Even Aunt Hilda was away — and if the sheriff happened to try to telephone her at her brother's in California—

Arthur sighed, turned away. This place which had been so wonderful had turned out to be a copy of Pleasant Valley, from which he had been forced to run. Here, just as there, men would dig into his flower garden. The beauty which the world might have seen would be destroyed.

He didn't go back home. Instead, he started on a long trip. He traveled by bus, by train, then he walked and walked and walked. One afternoon he stopped at a farmhouse to ask for a drink of water. The woman who answered the door was tall, thin, unattractive, middle aged—but she had a nice smile and she didn't drive him away. She didn't seem to have a husband. He didn't see a dog. He saw no flower garden.

Possibly, here was a new home. Arthur mopped his face. "It's been a terribly hot day, ma'am————"

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homicide, inc.

by . . . Richard Deming

MacDonald Sprague sat sidewise at the bar, frankly admiring the grave-faced blonde who sat with an escort a few feet away. But the admiration was entirely a surface veneer covering his cold loathing for the woman.

She looks more like a kitten than a murderess, he thought, studying the grave oval face with its slightly upslanting eyes. It was a face that seemed constantly to hold the promise of a smile which never materialized, a poker face, concealing all that lay behind it, yet somehow suggesting that if the mask were lifted, only laughter and innocence would be revealed.

It was hard to imagine those soft lips tensed in a cruel line and that tiny hand deliberately pumping bullets into a man. So hard that a strange reluctance mixed with the loathing in Mac's mind for the women he believed had killed his brother.

With his hat tilted back at a jaunty angle and with a glint

Richard Deming, who will be remembered for his A MEDAL FOR DON CARLOS which appeared in our July 1962 issue, is the author of the recent BODY FOR SALE (Pocket Books), THE CASE OF THE CRIME LORD (Pocket Books), THIS IS MY NIGHT (Monarch) and many other novels. Here, in this story, he writes about an FBI operative hunting a killer.

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of satanic humor in his eyes, no one would have suspected MacDonald Sprague's thoughts were composed of anything but admiration. He had rehearsed his part until everything about him was carelessly jaunty: his dress, his speech, his expression —even the way he moved in sudden controlled bounces. In physical appearance he only faintly resembled the deceased killer whose name he had assumed, but his personality was an almost exact copy.

The girl, though obviously aware of his scrutiny, seemed neither offended nor gratified, apparently accepting male admiration as a matter of course. But the man seated beside her did not share her indifference. Repeatedly he scowled at Mac, and once made as though to rise, but was stopped by the girl's small hand touching his arm. Though it was the merest touch, he subsided immediately.

The movement re-emphasized to Mac that he was playing a game so dangerous, the slightest slip would make it fatal. For the girl's scowling escort was Thomas Cougar, sometimes referred to as "The Strangler" because of his rumored proficiency with his pale, powerful hands.

Thomas Cougar was a tall, raw-boned man with an oddly narrow face with gray skin stretched so tightly it gave him a mummified appearance, an effect heightened by sparse, nearly colorless hair and eyebrows. Momentarily the mocking smile on Mac's lips died as his eyes unconsciously dropped to the man's enormously long and narrow fingers, which played with the stem of a cocktail glass. A mental image of those hands reaching for his throat caused Mac to shift his gaze hurriedly back to the girl.

The Town House was one of those glittering cocktail lounges of chrome and artificial leather, new but cheap, and already beginning to tarnish on the edges. It was the kind of place where the fringe of the underworld gathered—not actual criminals, but grifters and racetrack touts and petty gamblers. A forty-foot bar ran along one wall, and facing it along the opposite wall ran a forty-foot leatherette-upholstered bench before which, at spaced intervals, were set tiny cocktail tables. The blonde and her escort sat behind one of these a dozen feet closer to the door than Mac.

At this hour of the afternoon there were few customers, Mac was gratified to note, for the scene scheduled to occur at any minute was designed solely for the lovely blonde murderess. The fewer interested spectators, the better. At the moment, aside from Mac and the couple, two men seated at the bar near the door were the only customers.

George Doud slammed open

the street door and stalked in exactly on schedule. Without glancing at him, Mac drained his beer, set down the glass and slid from his stool, as though preparing to leave.

Purposefully, George stalked the length of the bar, his wide, flat face set in the belligerent stare of the slightly drunk, and his massive arms swinging at his sides. As he neared the table at which the blonde and her companion sat, he leered sidewise at her, slightly changed direction, and still looking, crashed heavily into Mac.

The smaller man bounced away like a tennis ball, automatically raised both hands to sparring position, then dropped them back to his sides.

"Stick out your hand when you make a turn, mister," he advised mildly.

George stared him up and down contemptuously. "Smart apple!" he said thickly, and lashed out with a fist the size of a grapefruit.

Mac's knees bent, lowering his head a foot, so that the blow merely swept off his hat. His left stabbed into the big fellow's stomach, his right immediately followed to the heart; then the heel of his left palm shoved against the other's blue-black jaw and smashed the man into the leatherette bench next to Thomas Cougar.

For a moment George remained seated, his expression dazed and his arms spread wide for support on either side. Then he whipped his arms toward each other. His right hand darted at his left sleeve, and a six-inch blade suddenly glittered.

Shifting his back toward the barkeep and the two customers near the door, Mac's fingers twinkled under his coat and out again. He held the automatic close to his body, so that only George, the blonde and Cougar could see it, but the muzzle centered unwaveringly between George Doud's eyes.

George let his mouth drop open, and the knife slipped from his fingers to the floor.

"Kick it over here," Mac said softly.

Obediently George toed the knife toward Mac. The smaller man stooped with a sudden springlike motion, and when he straightened with the knife in his left hand, the gun had disappeared.

Thomas Cougar made a furtive movement toward his shoulder.

"Don't touch it," Mac advised, "I can beat you with my back turned."

To prove it, he swung his back on all three, scooped his hat from the floor and started to move toward the entrance—a gesture not so heroic as it seemed, since in addition to the probability that Cougar's motion toward his gun had been instinctive rather than overt,

Mac knew George Doud would drop all of his 220 pounds on the gunman if Cougar even looked like he intended to draw.

"Wait, please," a soft voice called behind him.

Instantly Mac stopped. *She took the bait,* he thought with savage elation, but his expression was merely quizzical as he eyed her over his shoulder. When her lip corners lifted in the faintest hint of a smile, he turned around. Tossing George's knife on the bar, he said to the bartender, "Souvenir," and walked back to the table.

His eyes hard and his face expressionless, he said to George, "Scram."

George eyed the smaller man warily, licked his lips, rose to his feet and sidled widely around Mac. Like a frightened bear he lumbered toward the door and was gone.

With his face still expressionless, but with the light in his eyes turned from cold to mocking, Mac said to the girl, "Yes?"

"Sit down," she suggested, "and have a drink."

Mac shrugged, took a seat next to the girl and dropped his hat on the leather bench beside him.

"My name is Nan Tracy," she said. "And this is Thomas Cougar."

"Larry MacDowell," Mac said. "Generally called Mac." It was pure coincidence that he and the deceased gunman whose identity he had assumed answered to the same nickname, a coincidence which gave him the slight advantage of not having to learn to respond without thinking when his name was mentioned.

Mac nodded briefly at Cougar and received an equally brief nod in return. Hostility and suspicion seeped from the tall man's eyes, and his pale fingers caressed his glass stem as though he wished it were Mac's throat. For a wild moment Mac thought the man had detected the farce with George Doud, and he shifted his gaze to Nan Tracy in order to hide the uneasiness in his eyes.

The blonde was easier to look at anyway. Again he experienced a feeling almost of unbelief that her mask of innocence concealed a coldness and cupidity rare even in criminals — a mind that deliberately planned murder for profit.

"Your best contact is Nan Tracy," Mac's chief had said, "because Bart's last report was on her."

The chief had paused uncomfortably after mentioning Bart's name, and Mac felt the bitterness rise in him again. Young Bart, only a year out of law school, already advancing in the bureau and engaged to be married. The kid had the world by the tail, but suddenly the bright future was snuffed out by a senseless bullet.

Mac had said harshly, "All right. What about her?"

"She seems to be the recruiter of professional killers for the organization," the chief went on. "Possibly she even heads the whole setup. We're almost certain it was she who killed Bart when they suspected he was an FBI agent. At least we're sure it was a woman, and as far as we know, she's the only woman actively connected with Homicide, Incorporated."

"Nice name they picked for themselves," Mac commented.

"Describes the organization perfectly," the chief said grimly. "It's pure murder for hire, organized down to a T. For a fee they'll kill anyone, anywhere, anytime. Already they've operated in seven states that we know of, and no telling how many we don't know about."

"How the devil do they get customers?" Mac asked.

"Mainly through tie-ins with underworld gangs who hire them to do their dirty work. But they also seem to have a plant in at least one insurance company, because they seem to be able to find out what wives have heavily insured their husbands and vice versa, and then they quietly move in and offer to make the insurance payable for a fifty percent cut.

"Drake found out that much, which is why he began to work cooperatively with the insurance investigator from Argus Mutual. But when he and the Argus man both disappeared, we suspected the leak was at Argus, so Bart was instructed to contact no one but local police. Since his death, we don't trust anyone, and you're going in on your own. I'm giving you George Doud as an assistant, but aside from you two, myself and the big chief, no one at all will know you're a bureau man. If you slip up, it's your own fault, and not because of a leak'"

At the time this information had been reassuring, but now that Mac was actually confronted by his adversaries, a chill skittered along his spine. He knew that at the slightest suspicion that he was a federal agent, he would follow the same road as Drake and Bart Sprague.

Nan Tracy said, "What will you drink?"

"I've had it," Mac said. "I came back for the proposition, not the drink."

Her eyes widened innocently. "Proposition?"

"I'm a direct guy," Mac said. "For a half-hour I give you the eye from the bar, and you don't even know I'm alive. Then I draw a gun faster than you've ever seen one pulled, and right away you get chummy. Your pal has 'mug' written all over him and a heater under his arm. I can add. You've got a

proposition for my gun. So spill it."

Cougar growled, "I don't like the way you talk, buster."

"Then lump it," Mac said indifferently.

The Strangler stiffened and the stem of his glass snapped between powerful fingers. The girl touched his arm, which kept him in his seat, but his eyes turned icily cruel.

"You *are* direct," the girl said. "Where you from, Mac?"

"Out of town," Mac said shortly.

"Hot?"

Mac shook his head. "I leave places before I get hot. The only thing any cop could pin on me is carrying a gun without a license."

Nan Tracy's eyes half closed and she regarded him contemplatively through the slits. She asked slowly, "What would you be willing to do with your gun for five hundred dollars a week?"

Mac looked at her expressionlessly for a long time before answering. "Depends," he said finally. "In a safe setup—anything. In a risky one I didn't like — nothing. And by risky, I mean gunning the law. I'll go up against other guns, if the chance of a rap is slim enough."

"Suppose we go up to my place and talk it over," the girl suggested.

"What can I lose but my time," Mac suggested.

Nan's "place" turned out to be an apartment on the seventh floor of the exclusive Plaza Towers. Nan opened the door with a key, stepped in and then turned to face Mac with her hand out.

"I'll take your hat," she said, her face as still as usual, but her eyes smiling.

As Mac handed it to her, he heard the door click shut behind him and started to glance casually over his shoulder at Cougar, who had entered last. He stopped with his head half-turned when he felt hard metal press against his spine.

"Just don't move," said the girl, her eyes still smiling.

Mac stood motionless as her hand slid under his coat and removed his automatic. Efficiently she patted his pockets and hips for other weapons, then backed away, dropped Mac's hat on an end table and seated herself in a soft chair.

She pointed Mac's gun at him and said softly, "All right, Thomas. You may put it away now."

The pressure disappeared from Mac's back and the Strangler carefully circled toward a sofa so that he did not pass between Mac and the automatic.

"What's the pitch?" Mac growled.

"Sit down," the girl suggested, motioning toward an easy chair directly opposite her own.

Mac sank into the chair,

stretched his legs with an aplomb he did not feel and repeated, "What's the pitch?"

"Just being careful," Nan said. "Now tell me all about yourself."

"Why?"

"Because," Cougar put in sulkily, "I'll test my grip on your throat if you don't."

Mac glanced at the man's mummified face, let his eyes drop to the long narrow fingers which were gently massaging each other, and hastily looked back at the girl.

"What do you want to know?"

Nan Tracy looked him over thoughtfully before replying. Her lovely face was strictly business. She said, "You can start by telling us your real name."

"MacDowell," Mac said. "Larry MacDowell. I told you I wasn't hot, so why should I use a fake name?"

Nan glanced inquiringly over at Cougar, who said grudgingly:

"Sounds faintly familiar, but I can't place where I heard it. A guy as fancy with a rod as this Joe, I ought to have heard of. I keep my ear pretty close to the grapevine. But he don't ring a bell."

Dissatisfaction showed in his expression and his tone became almost querulous. "You jumped at him too fast. Suppose he turns out to be a cop, or maybe a Fed? Now he knows something's up, and you can't just kick him out. So we got a body on our hands."

Mac quirked his lips in what was meant to be an insolent grin, but which he feared more resembled a sickly one.

Nan's voice developed an edge of ice. "Since you were let in on my next higher contact, you've begun to cultivate a bad habit, Thomas. I still do your thinking for you, and if you get too big for your boots, the boss may order you buried in them."

Cougar's already pale face turned even paler and he muttered something about only trying to be helpful. Mac's mind sifted over the words, *Next higher contact*, and came to the tentative conclusion that more than one link in the organization of Homicide, Inc., existed above Nan. At the same time he experienced mild surprise that the emotionless Cougar exhibited such fear at mention of the boss. He mentally filed the knowledge for future reference.

Nan turned her attention back to Mac. "Who have you been connected with, Mac? Give us some references. Something we can check."

Her eyes still seemed to be smiling, but her lips were a hard straight line. Mac felt a flood of thankfulness that he had briefed himself for just such an emergency.

"John Hagen in New Or-

leans," he said. "Jimmy Dow in L. A."

"Hagen—" Cougar started to say, then stopped and looked at Nan apologetically.

"Go on, Thomas," she said.

Encouraged, he swung his gaze back to Mac, and suspicion mixed in his eyes with the hostility already there. "Hagen's dead and Dow's at Alcatraz," he said coldly.

Mac shrugged. "Barrel-Head Morgan in St. Louis."

Nan's expression showed interest. "We did some work for him once," she said to Cougar. "Put in a call."

The Strangler went into the hallway and they could hear him giving a St. Louis number to the operator. Five minutes passed while the girl's grave eyes examined Mac without expression.

Mac employed the time to glance around the room, noting two of the doors leading off it seemed to lead to bedrooms.

Cougar came back and spat, "Morgan's on a Mediterranean cruise. How many more guys who aren't available can you dream up?" His expression had changed from suspicion to open disbelief.

Mac glanced at Nan's face, noting something new there which was not exactly suspicion, but a kind of alertness. A bead of cold sweat trickled down his side, but he managed to say unconcernedly, "Those boys were before my time. Try my last boss, Dude Emory in Philly. He was alive and present a month ago."

Cougar started to turn toward the hall again, but Nan said, "Wait, Thomas. I'll call him myself."

She waited while Cougar drew a revolver from beneath his arm and covered Mac, then lowered her own gun and went into the hall.

Again Mac sat quietly while the call went through, but this time his muscles were bunched to throw himself at Cougar at the first intimation that his masquerade had failed. For Dude Emory was his hole card, and unless he spoke the proper words, Mac knew he was as good as dead.

Only two weeks before, the FBI fingerprint department had identified as Larry MacDowell an unclaimed accident victim lying in a Brooklyn morgue. No news release had been made for the specific purpose of letting Mac use his name.

Their physical descriptions roughly tallied, but Mac was counting more on the psychology of his acting than on physical resemblance. Most persons in describing someone do not say something like, "A man weighing 240 pounds, light brown hair, gray eyes, freckles, a hook nose and a dimple in his chin." Instead they say, "A big fellow with horn-rimmed glasses, who is always pursing his

lips and talks about nothing but baseball."

Mac hoped that Emory's description would be something like, "A stocky guy of average height who sort of bounces when he moves. Wears his hat on the back of his head and always has a mocking grin, like he doesn't give a damn about anything."

There was a good possibility the stunt would work, but there was also a double risk. Possibly Larry MacDowell's death had been gangland vengeance, rather than the accident it seemed, in which case Dude Emory undoubtedly would be aware of it through the underworld grapevine. And also Emory might mention the cheek scar MacDowell bore, which MacDonald Sprague lacked. Mac found himself wishing Cougar had made the call instead of Nan for the alert light in her eyes warned him she would not be too easily fooled.

When Nan finally returned, Mac forced his gaze to meet hers, and immediately he knew he had won, for there was a faint touch of respect in her eyes.

"Dude Emory seems to think you're the devil on wheels with a gun, Mac." She handed back his automatic butt first. "Sorry for the inconvenience, but we don't take any chances."

"That's all right," Mac said agreeably, concealing his flood of relief. "I prefer working for an outfit that doesn't."

He slipped the automatic back in its holster and stared pointedly at the revolver still in Cougar's hand. Slowly the Strangler replaced it beneath his arm, but none of the hostility disappeared from his eyes, and very little of the suspicion.

This guy is going to watch me, Mac told himself, *and I better watch him if I want to stay alive.*

Nan had returned to her chair and was eying Mac speculatively. "How would you like to work for Homicide, Incorporated?" she asked abruptly.

Mac sat up straight and forced a look of surprise on to his face. "Homicide, Inc.! I've heard of that, and it's bigger than any of the guys I mentioned. Don't tell me that outfit is run by a woman!"

"I won't tell you anything," she said in a suddenly cold voice. "Who runs it is none of your business. You'll get your orders and your salary from me. Who I get them from is something you don't have to know, and if you try to find out, Thomas will discourage the attempt by squeezing your throat until you stop breathing—permanently."

"All right," Mac said agreeably. "I won't pry. Just so I get paid regularly, and know I'll be taken care of if I get in a jam."

"You'll get five hundred a

week, and if you get in a pinch, the best legal talent in the country will be retained to defend you."

"You've got a new employee," Mac said.

For the first time Nan almost smiled; but instead of being reassured, coldness crept along Mac's spine.

She turned to Cougar and said, "You better run along now, Thomas. I want to talk to Mac for a while."

The already tight skin seemed to tighten even more across the Strangler's narrow face, and his eyes shot open hatred at Mac. But he rose obediently, muttered a good night and left.

As soon as the door closed behind Cougar, Nan's brittle mask seemed to melt away. For a moment she stood staring at the door with a kind of uneasy relief, looking more like a bewildered young girl than a lieutenant in a murder organization. Again Mac experienced a sense of shock at the combination of sympathy and revulsion her two-faceted character aroused in him.

"I hate him!" she said in a low voice. "I've wished him dead a thousand times!"

Mac looked at her with his mouth open, unable to correlate her obvious fear and detestation of Cougar with the cold and domineering manner in which she ordered him around. If she really wished the man dead, she was certainly in a position to get him that way. He wondered if for some obscure reason she was putting on an act, and resolved to guard his reactions carefully.

She shook herself like a kitten throwing off water, moved over to Mac's chair, took his hand and led him to the sofa. Puzzledly he sat beside her while she continued to hold his hand tightly.

"I'm afraid," she said simply. "I needed you badly."

On guard, he examined her face, noting the wild excitement deep in her eyes. For a moment he thought the excitement was amorous, and wondered how he could duck such a squeamish situation, for he had no desire to make love to his brother's murderess. But immediately he sensed it was something else—an uncertainty and something closely allied to terror.

She released his hand suddenly, clasped both of hers in her lap and looked up at him with a strange mixture of hope and wariness in her expression.

"I'm glad you've come in with me, Mac," she said, then added quickly, "With us, I mean."

A theory began to form in Mac's mind, a theory that explained her dialogue with Cougar as well as her present action, which he half suspected was a deliberate act. The theory was that Nan was the real head of Homicide, Inc., and her

talk of a "next higher contact" plus her present act was deliberate red herring.

At the same time she looked so frightened, so small and so defenseless, he automatically dropped a protective arm across her shoulders, one part of his mind half believing she really needed masculine protection, and the other part regarding himself with amazed disgust. Her head tilted upward, and in spite of his resolution, he kissed her. For a second he completely forgot himself.

Her lips clung to his coolly. For a moment he completely forgot she was a murderess, forgot his mission, forgot everything but the soft outline of her mouth. Then recollection sent a wave of revulsion over him and he jerked back so suddenly, Nan's eyes widened in surprise.

At the same moment the door opened quietly and a woman entered from the hall.

She was a slim, shy-appearing brunette of about twenty-eight, pretty in a delicate-featured, subdued sort of way, but the type that instinctively huddle in the background and are therefore overlooked.

She gave an embarrassed cough, and stood twisting the strap of her bag uncertainly.

"Why, Claire," Nan said in a surprised voice. "Is it after five?"

"Five-thirty," Claire said apologetically.

Mac rose and Nan said, "This is Mr. MacDowell, Claire. Claire D'Arcy, Mac. She shares the apartment with me."

Nan's air of defenselessness had vanished, and her eyes were again brittle and mocking. "Claire is a working girl. Chief file clerk for Argus Mutual. She toils from eight to five while I flit from cafe to cocktail lounge, and secretly she disapproves of me."

"Why, I do no such thing!" Claire said, coloring.

Mac lowered his lids to conceal the flash of interest inspired by the name, Argus Mutual. But he made no attempt to slow his racing mind.

The leak at Argus was immediately obvious, yet so simple it was no wonder it worked. One look at Claire D'Arcy was enough to indicate that her company would regard her as above suspicion, as she probably was. Even if they knew of Nan, it would never occur to Argus that the attractive apartment-mate of their chief file clerk was part of Homicide, Inc. Nor would it occur to the shy girl, who undoubtedly was glad of a sympathetic audience to listen to her story of the day's work, never suspecting she was furnishing information to the most ruthless murder gang in the country.

The simplicity and audacity of the plan almost shocked Mac into letting jubilation show on his face. Instead, he greeted the

girl civilly and mumbled something about having to run along.

"Come take me to dinner tomorrow night," Nan told him at the door. "Be here at six and I'll make you a cocktail first." She added in a lower voice, "We can't talk in front of Claire."

As Mac's taxi pulled away from the Plaza Towers, Mac saw by a glance through the rear window that another cab a quarter block back pulled out a moment later.

"Union Hotel," he told the driver. "And don't bother trying to lose our tail."

Startled, the cabbie glanced at his rear-view mirror, then shrugged and kept silent.

The other taxi went on by when Mac's driver stopped in front of the Union Hotel's main entrance. Without glancing at it, Mac paid off his driver and entered the hotel. From the corner of his eye he saw the second taxi park fifty yards down the street.

At the desk he got his key, then entered the elevator with several other passengers.

"Two," he said to the operator.

Getting out at the second floor, he walked quickly to the stairs, descended a half-flight and peered over the bannister into the lobby. Thomas Cougar and a gangling, freckle-faced man who seemed to be with him were talking to the desk clerk. Something passed from Cougar's hand to that of the clerk, who glanced at it, grinned delightedly and began bobbing his head in eager subservience.

Mac drew back out of sight, mounted stairs to the third floor and let himself into his room. It was only six o'clock, and he stretched himself on the bed until it got dark.

When it had grown quite dark, he went into the bathroom, turned on the light and wrote a detailed report of the day's events. Then without turning on the room light, he crossed his bedroom to the window, noiselessly raised it and carefully scanned the street below.

A window stick used for opening and closing the upper part of the window hung from a bracket on the wall. Mac rapped its brass head sharply against the ceiling three times. A moment later a tin can suspended from a string descended from the window above him and gently settled on the outer ledge. Mac stuffed his report into the can, and it immediately rose again.

Silently closing the window again, Mac slipped on his coat to go downstairs for dinner. As he pulled shut his door, he glanced along the hall casually, and saw what he expected to see. Diagonally across the hall from his room a door stood open about an inch, and the room beyond was dark. Appar-

ently Thomas Cougar's suspicions were far from allayed by the phone call to Dude Emory, and he intended to have every move Mac made watched.

Without glancing at the slightly ajar door again, Mac made straight for the elevator. A half hour later, when he came up again, his room had been expertly searched. So expertly that even though he had expected it, he himself had to look for ten minutes before he found evidence of the search in the form of a pair of socks replaced in an order different from the way he had memorized it.

At exactly six the next evening Mac rang the buzzer of Nan's apartment. But instead of Nan answering the door, it was opened by Claire D'Arcy, who wore a simple blue house dress.

"Oh, Mr. MacDowell," Claire said. "Nan would have called, but she didn't know where you were staying. She was suddenly called out of town and had to catch a plane."

"Oh," Mac said, and waited blankly.

"Nan said to tell you she was sorry, and if you'd leave your number, she'd phone you tomorrow. In the meantime, I'm supposed to give you the cocktail she promised." She stepped back and held the door wide. "Won't you come in?"

"Thanks," Mac said, following her into the living room. It occurred to him that perhaps Nan's sudden trip was a stroke of luck, for he might never find another opportunity to sound out her apartment mate alone, and on impulse he said:

"If you haven't had dinner, maybe you'd substitute for Nan —unless you mind being second choice. I planned to take her to the Blue Penguin."

"I'm afraid I've already started cooking dinner," Claire said. "And besides, I'm not dressed for dining out." Hesitantly she added, "If you like, you may eat here. I always cook three times too much."

"I wouldn't want to put you to any bother."

"No bother at all," she assured him, and her eyes lighted with a shy eagerness that almost startled him, for he did not regard himself as the type of man maidens yearn for. He wrote it off as a symptom of loneliness, which might make her glad of any male company.

"Dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes," she said, taking it for granted he would stay. "Please mix yourself a drink while you're waiting. You'll find everything on the sideboard."

"Thanks, but I'd prefer a bottle of beer, if you have one." Actually he preferred a cocktail, but Larry MacDowell's drink had been beer, so now it was Mac's.

"In the refrigerator," she

said. "You can drink it at the kitchen table and watch me cook, if you like."

"That's my speed," Mac grinned at her. "I feel more at home in the kitchen."

They ate at the kitchen table, and afterward Mac helped her with the dishes. Accustomed to dining almost exclusively in restaurants, the domesticity of the situation had a curious effect on Mac. He found himself enjoying the evening more than he ever enjoyed the glitter of cafes and night clubs. Under the influence of his obvious enjoyment, Claire's shyness evaporated. Beneath the shyness Mac found a quiet intelligence and a nice sense of humor.

By the time the dishes were finished, they had become old friends, and Claire was laughing and chattering like a complete extrovert. Almost automatically their hands clasped together as she led him back into the front room.

When they sat together on the same sofa where Mac had been caught in the act of kissing Nan, Claire snuggled against his shoulder without a trace of her former shyness and looked up at him in almost open invitation.

With an effort Mac recalled that his purpose in staying to dinner was not pleasure, but business.

He made a face at her and asked casually, "How long have you lived here with Nan?"

"About six months. But I don't live with her. She lives with me. It was my apartment originally. I met Nan at a party." She moved away slightly. "Are you very fond of Nan?"

Mac dropped his arm across her shoulder and drew her back in place. "I barely know her. Seems like a nice girl, though."

"Nicer than I?"

Mac frowned, not being particularly fond of coyness; then turned the frown into a grin. "You've got one big advantage over her." You're here."

"Rat!" she said, and started to twist out of his arms.

He pulled her back and kissed her. And suddenly her arms were about his neck and her lips were pressed against his so fiercely, he was startled. Compared to Nan's cool lips, Claire's were like fire. Mac experienced the combined sensation of wrestling with a leopard and holding one finger in a live wall socket.

When eventually he forcibly broke the kiss to prevent suffocation, she snuggled against him with her head pressed to his chest and her soft hair tickling his chin.

"You shouldn't kiss me like that," she said in a muffled voice.

Mac gazed down at her bent head in amazement. "Does seem a waste of time," he said sarcastically. "I can get the same effect by falling down a flight of stairs."

"Who are you, Mac?" she asked in the same muffled voice.

"MacDowell. Larry MacDowell. Remember?"

"I mean, what do you do?"

"I'm a C.P.A.," he said truthfully, though the only accounting work he had done since school was checking books for evidence on FBI cases.

"What's your business with Nan?"

He frowned down at the top of her head. "What business with Nan?"

Suddenly she straightened and moved a safe two feet away from him. "Why do so many men come to see Nan who don't seem to be men friends, but appear to have some business arrangements with her? All types of men, like that awful Thomas Cougar. Who are they, and what do they want?"

"How should I know?" Mac evaded. "I just met the girl, and don't know a thing about her. Maybe they're business friends." He paused, as though the thought had just occurred to him. "What is her business, anyway? She must have some kind of income to keep up her half of this place."

"When she suggested we share the apartment, she said some money had been left her. She hasn't any kind of job, and doesn't do much of anything but move around socially. But lately I've gotten the impression these men who call on her have something to do with her income, and that she never inherited any money. I can't explain it. It's just a feeling, and it bothers me because I like Nan." She looked at Mac in sudden suspicion. "Maybe you're one of them, and know all about it."

"You're imagining things." Mac said, and reached for her again.

Feeling he had obtained what little information Claire had, and that further questions might cause her to suspect he was pumping her and make her mention it to Nan, Mac decided to devote the rest of the evening to pleasure. But he discovered he could not dislodge the subject from Claire's thoughts. Time and again she returned to her suspicion that Mac was one of the men somehow tied to Nan, sometimes bluntly accusing him of it, sometimes cajoling him to tell her what Nan was involved in, and never entirely accepting his protest that he had no idea what she was talking about.

In the middle of a kiss she would return to the subject, and finally Mac began to wonder who was the pumper and who the pumpee. Her probing alarmed him for her own safety, for if curiosity led her to the point of questioning Nan, her questions might lead her to the bottom of the river.

He turned over in his mind

the thought of warning her, but discarded it as too dangerous to his own position in case Nan ever learned of the warning. There was nothing to do but persist in his denials, and eventually he succeeded in smothering her questions by keeping her lips occupied.

When he left the apartment at midnight, his suit was rumpled, his collar covered with lipstick and his head was spinning like a gyroscope. So far out of his mind had Claire D'Arcy succeeded in knocking Homicide, Inc., he almost forgot to bother to check if he was still being tailed.

It was only when his eyes fell on the door of the room diagonally across from his own and noted it was still ajar that he came back to the present.

Inwardly he grinned, wondering if the spy beyond the door had noticed the red smear on his collar and would report to Cougar that his throat seemed to be cut.

At noon the next day the room phone awakened Mac. It was Nan Tracy.

"I'm sorry about last night," she said in a tight, unnatural voice.

"That's all right. What's the matter?"

"Got a business deal on." She seemed to be under terrific excitement, for her tone was so forced, her voice nearly cracked. "If you haven't had lunch, get some, because you won't have another opportunity. I'll pick you up in an hour."

"I'll be waiting in the lobby," he said quietly.

So he was to be given an assignment, he thought. Probably the result of her plane trip last night. He hoped it was a one-man assignment. Managing to fail to murder his designated victim would be easier without a witness.

But apparently it was a big mission, for Thomas Cougar and another man were with Nan when she arrived. Mac rose from the lobby sofa where he had been waiting when the three entered, and Nan introduced the second man as Arnold Link. He was a squat, broadly powerful man with "gorilla" written all over him.

Cougar said, "You three wait here a minute," and his tone made it almost an order.

Mac stared after him puzzledly as the pale killer crossed to the desk and employed the house phone, which could be used only to phone rooms. In a moment Cougar returned and all of them stood waiting, as though expecting someone to join them.

"What's up?" Mac asked tentatively.

Nan and Cougar stared at him fixedly, as though they had not heard the question.

Squat Arnold Link said in a

toneless monotone, "You'll find out when we get there. We do not blab in hotel lobbies."

A man who apparently had gotten off one of the elevators suddenly joined the group. Without surprise Mac noted he was the same man he had seen in the lobby with Cougar the night he peered over the bannister.

"Benny Chisholm," Cougar said briefly, "Mac MacDowell."

Benny was a tall, gangling fellow with a large nose and freckles. His wide, yokel-like eyes were blandly innocent, but the effect was spoiled by a mouth which was nothing but a cruel, lipless gash. He nodded without offering his hand.

My friend across the hall, Mac thought, and glanced at Nan. With a shock he realized she was actually smiling, but her smile did not come up to the promise at which her usual grave expression hinted. It was fixed and brittle, and her eyes glittered as though she were under intense strain.

The smile made the hair on the back of his neck rise, and something about the flat look with which the three men regarded him warned him of danger. It suddenly occurred to him that he somehow might have been found out, and the gathering might not be a mission at all, but a one-way ride for MacDonald Sprague.

"I forgot to leave my key at the desk," he said abruptly, and before anyone else could speak, turned on his heel and walked rapidly across the lobby.

Tossing his key on the desk, he said to the clerk in a quick but low voice, "Phone room 418 for me and tell Mr. Crowell I can't meet him for lunch."

Instead of immediately returning to the group, he cut diagonally across to the tobacco counter and bought a package of cigarettes. As he paid for them, he saw from the corner of his eye that the clerk was just setting down the phone. Now it was necessary to stall at least a moment in order to allow George Doud time to act on the code message.

Turning toward the group, he called, "Be right with you," then deliberately opened the cigarette pack, removed one and lit it at the tobacco counter's gas lighter.

All five of them crowded into a long black sedan which was parked in front of the hotel. Squat Arnold Link drove, Nan sat next to him in the front seat, and Mac found himself between the Strangler and the freckled Benny Chisholm.

"What's the deal, now that we're out of the lobby?" Mac asked as they pulled away.

"It'll keep a while," Cougar said shortly. The thick-shouldered chauffeur drove smoothly, obeying all traffic rules in town, and when they left the city limits, pushed up to a sedate

fifty miles an hour and kept it there.

At the end of the hour, about thirty-five miles from town, the driver said, "Taxi tailing us."

Mac started to twist his head rearward, but Cougar said sharply, "Keep your face front." To Link he said, "Pull over and park."

Immediately the sedan slowed, pulled onto the shoulder and stopped. In a few moments a cab went by without slowing.

"Got butterflies in your stomach, Link?" Cougar asked contemptuously. "Just because a taxi travels the same speed we do, doesn't mean we're being tailed."

When the sedan pulled away again, the taxi was a quarter of a mile ahead. Link dropped his speed to forty, and soon it could not be seen at all. A mile farther on, they turned to one side on a dirt road.

Twenty minutes later they turned into a private lane, drove another five-hundred yards and stopped before a large, one-story log hunting cabin. Everyone got out. As they approached the door, Nan linked her left arm through Mac's right.

Behind them Cougar said, "Thanks, Nan," and his gun pressed into Mac's back. "Now just remove that automatic from under his arm."

Mac stood very still as Nan, still holding his right arm, reached under his coat with her free hand and slipped the automatic from its clip holster.

As she stepped away from him, he said, "This is getting to be a habit. What's the pitch this time?"

"Get moving, copper!" Cougar snarled at his back, and emphasized the command by jabbing his spine with the gun muzzle.

At the word "copper" Mac's hopes sank. He walked forward stiffly, prodded by the Strangler's gun, and entered the cabin. Inside Mac found a long beam-ceilinged room running the entire width of the front. It was furnished with rustic furniture and had a fireplace at each end. Directly across from the entrance a drape-covered doorway led to another room in back.

When he reached the center of the room, Mac stopped and looked inquiringly over his shoulder. Cougar had paused just inside the door, and Nan stood with the two other men at one side, as though all three were merely interested observers.

"All right, copper," Cougar said. "Start explaining who you are."

Mac looked at Nan. "I thought you gave the orders around here. How come Ugly is tossing his weight around now?"

Cougar's face darkened, but before he could speak, Nan said viciously, "Thomas is the fair-haired boy now. He brought the

teacher an apple and got promoted to honor student." Her answer was to Mac's question, but she spoke directly to Cougar and the vicious tone was meant for him.

So there actually was someone higher than Nan in the organization, Mac thought. Hoping to create a diversion, he asked, "Got demoted, did you, Nan? What was the apple?"

Nan's eyes swung at him. "*You* were. Smarty-pants Thomas phoned Dude Emory again and asked more detailed questions. When he found out Larry MacDowell had a cheek scar, he went running to teacher instead of to me, and got marked A for effort."

"Is that all the fuss is about?" Mac asked indifferently. "Ever hear of plastic surgery?"

"Sure," Cougar said. "I thought of that, which is why I asked the color of his eyes. Explain how you changed your eyes from blue to brown, and we'll let you go."

"Shoe polish," Mac said seriously.

Benny Chisholm said, "What we waiting for? Let's get this over with."

"The boss wants her to do it personal," Cougar said, nodding at Nan. "To sort of make up for her boner."

He slipped a second gun, a vest pocket automatic, from his coat pocket and held it butt first toward Nan.

"Take him in there," he said, pointing his own gun toward the drape-covered door.

Nan's eyes brightened, almost as though she were glad of the opportunity to kill. "All right, Mac, darling," she said. "Forward march."

Tickles of cold sweat ran down Mac's sides beneath his shirt, but he managed to keep both his expression and his tone mocking. "Murder gets to be habit forming, doesn't it, Nan? You're becoming almost the official executioner for Homicide, Incorporated."

"What do you mean by that?" she said suspiciously.

"I won't be the first suspected cop you killed, will I? About the fourth now, isn't it?"

Cougar emitted a single hoarse guffaw, which was half laugh and half snarl.

Nan's eyes burned at the Strangler and she spat, "Don't throw so much weight around that you get in the boss' hair. You don't know how close you have come to the river before, when you got over-ambitious."

His pale features lost what little color they had, and he seemed to shrink within himself. Nan tossed her head in triumph at having at least temporarily put him in his place, then jabbed her little gun at Mac.

"I said *move*. Or do you want it right here?"

Abruptly Mac turned toward the doorway and pushed through the drapes, Nan following with

the gun almost touching his back. The second room proved to be sleeping quarters and contained nothing but two double bunks, two heavy dressers and what seemed to be a closet, for at one side of the room was a second drape-covered door.

"Turn around," Nan commanded in a loud voice.

Slowly Mac turned to face her, his body tensed against the expected jolt of a bullet. Nan's face was dead white and her eyes held a gleam of unnatural excitement.

In a voice so low he could barely hear it, she said, "I haven't time to explain, but take this gun and go out shooting."

Mac's jaw hung wide as she suddenly reversed the pistol and thrust the butt into his palm.

"Now hit me," she said tensely. "Quick, so I'll have an out! Make it look like you got the gun by force.

But Mac merely stared at her.

"Quick!" she said fiercely. "Hit me! Hard!"

Recovering his mental balance, he clenched his left fist, slowly and almost reluctantly raised it chest high, then suddenly lashed out and caught Nan square on the chin. Her eyes crossed and she dropped flat on her back.

The drapes parted as Cougar pushed through, his revolver half-raised. Centering the little automatic on the Strangler's vest, Mac squeezed the trigger and stepped back.

There was nothing but a sharp click. Cougar grinned wolfishly, and as Mac stared blankly down at the empty gun, a soft chuckle came from the side of the room. Mac glanced sidewise just as Claire D'Arcy stepped from the closet, a man-sized .45 automatic clenched in her small hand.

"An interesting show, and just what I expected," Claire said.

Nan sat up and dazedly felt of her chin.

"Thanks for the demonstration, Nan," Claire said sardonically. "Did you really think we'd trust you with a loaded gun after planting a cop in our midst?"

Nan worked her lower jaw tentatively and remained both seated and silent.

"When Dude Emory told Thomas over the phone that he *had* informed you of Larry MacDowell's cheek scar and blue eyes, there were only two explanations possible for your not branding Mac here a cop right then and there, and taking necessary action," Claire said. "Either you are awfully stupid, or you're a cop yourself. I rigged up this little act so I could listen in and learn which." She smiled, and there was an unpleasant glitter in her eyes. "Now we can have a double funeral."

The whole picture clicked together in Mac's mind, and at the same time his mind wildly searched for a way out of the situation. Seemingly of its own accord there popped into his remembrance the Strangler's craven f e a r of the "boss," and Nan's constant needling of him about the "boss' " dislike of his over-ambition. With the remembrance a wild idea occurred to him.

"You mean a triple funeral, don't you, Claire?" Mac asked insinuatingly.

She looked at him suspiciously. "What do you mean by that crack?"

"Just what I said." Mac made his voice confident. "T h r e e people in this room are going to die."

Both Claire and C o u g a r frowned at him intently, and a faint uncertaintly appeared in Cougar's eyes.

"I suppose you told Cougar I didn't know you were head of Homicide, Incorporated, a n d had been completely taken in by Nan acting as your front," Mac continued blandly. "But you see, Cougar knows you deliberately sent Nan out of town yesterday so you could talk to me alone in order to satisfy yourself I was s a f e. He also knows I spent six hours in your apartment, b e c a u s e he was having me tailed."

"So what?" Cougar a s k e d roughly.

"So she never even suspected I was a cop then," Mac shot at him. "She didn't suspect it until you told her today. Last night she thought I was just a newly hired gun, and she gave me an assignment." His next words he spaced s l o w l y and distinctly. "She said you were getting too big for your boots, Cougar. And she told me to kill you. That's the third funeral. She'll get you b e f o r e you get out of this room."

The uncertainty in the gunman's eyes had turned to fear and suspicion. Like a trapped animal he swung his eyes from Mac to Claire and back again. Claire's expression was merely one of indulgent amusement. Apparently she did not realize the profound impression Mac was making on Cougar.

"Nice try anyway, Mac," she said, and her .45 centered on his stomach.

Cougar's eyes were still on Mac, as Mac shouted, "Look out, Cougar!"

The muzzle of the Strangler's revolver jerked toward Claire and suddenly spat flame. At the same moment Mac hurled his e m p t y automatic straight at Cougar's narrow face. It caught the man square in the left eye. Cougar staggered backward.

Mac hit him in a headlong tackle, and the revolver skittered along the floor to a far corner. As they grappled, Cougar's elbow caught Mac under the chin.

At the moment a r e g u l a r

fusillade of shots came from the next room, but Mac was too busy to concern himself with anything but the Strangler, who had managed to twist on top of him and get his powerful hands on his throat.

Desperately Mac tried to claw the hands loose, but they held with the grip of a vise. The pale, mummy-like face was inches from his, and the man's teeth were bared in a sadistic smile. With his lungs bursting and waves of darkness pressing against him. Mac's struggles became weaker and weaker.

His distended eyes were nearly popping from his head when the Strangler's cruel smile suddenly faded into a vacuous grin. His grip relaxed and he collapsed.

For a moment Mac could do nothing but suck great gobs of air into his lungs. Then, as his sight cleared, he was conscious of Nan peering down at him anxiously, Cougar's revolver held in her hand like a club.

"Drop it, lady," said a flat voice.

Nan's gun clattered to the floor and her hands slowly rose at sight of the gun muzzle threatening her from the doorway. Mac pushed Cougar off and sat up.

"I thought that was probably you giving them fits out there," he said to George Doud. "Never mind Nan. She's on our side." He looked at her wryly. "What are you anyway, Nan? A detective for Argus Mutual?"

She nodded. "I couldn't warn you today because Thomas and Claire were with me when I phoned. They never let me out of their sight for a minute."

Mac climbed to his feet and glanced over at what had been Claire D'Arcy. Cougar's bullet had caught her in the forehead, and she had died instantly.

"How about out there?" Mac asked George, nodding toward the other room.

"Both dead," George said shortly. "Neither one had their guns out when both decided to take a chance, but only the freckled-faced guy managed to clear his holster. But he didn't get in a shot."

"That finishes Homicide, Incorporated, then," Nan said. "You're FBI, aren't you?"

Mac nodded.

"I began to suspect it when all your references were so conveniently unavailable. That's why I took the last phone call myself. After Dude's description, I was almost sure, and was trying to work up to telling you who I was when Claire walked in and caught us—ah—talking."

"Was it Claire who killed Bart Sprague?" Mac asked.

"Who?"

"The FBI man who was shot a month ago. He was my kid brother."

"Oh," Nan said. "I'm sorry. I was too late to stop that. I didn't even realize he was an FBI man until it was all over.

Yes, Claire handled that personally, just as she intended to handle you."

Mac glanced over at the dead woman once more and smiled a dead smile lacking the bitter satisfaction he had expected to find with revenge. Then he looked down at Nan's white face.

"You've got a lot of guts for a woman," he said. "With all those bullets and all this blood, most women would faint."

"You have to be t o u g h to work for Argus Mutual," Nan said.

Then she fainted.

NEXT MONTH —

JAMAICAN ROSE
by SAX ROHMER

THE DOGS OF FOH
by BARRY PEROWNE

LAST CURTAIN
by FREDERIC BROWN

THE GUARDIAN
by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

GHOST TOWN
by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE ARROW OF GOD
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

and

THE SPECTRE OF RUSSIAN HILL

A NEW STORY by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

— in the December issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

---

strange ransom

by . . . Wenzell Brown

A history of kidnapping would reveal that the motives lying behind this crime are many and varied. The victim may be seized for revenge, political advantages, as a hostage, for financial gain or a score of other reasons. Payment has ranged from a few pennies to vast fortunes. But it is doubtful if any more curious kidnapping has ever occurred than that perpetrated by Grainne O'Maille in 1593. And certainly no stranger ransom has ever been exacted.

The setting of the crime is singularly fitting to its bizarre nature. Howth Head is a promontory of grim, grey stones stretching out into Dublin Bay like a skeletal hand. Today passengers traveling from London to Dublin by plane will find this the first bit of Irish mainland to be sighted. Even when splashed by bright sunlight, there is a forbidding, almost sinister quality about the rocky fingers and the graceless grey church that tops the rounded hills. When night falls spectral lights move among the barren, uninhabited islands nearby and sometimes gleam through the

Wenzell Brown will be remembered by readers of this magazine for his WITNESS TO MURDER (July 1958, SMM) and for his more recent I AM NOT A MURDERER (June 1962, SMM). Widely known for his novels and studies of teen-age crime in these times, Mr. Brown here turns to the story of a strange kidnapping in the Sixteenth Century.

arched windows of the tumbledown cathedral of the abandoned leper colony on the tiny coastal island known as Ireland's Eye. The fisherfolk of Howth will regale the stranger with stories of supernatural visitations to explain these lights and some will claim that the ghost of Grainne O'Maille still prowls the district to make sure that the heirs of Howth have not reneged on the sworn oath of their ancestor. It must be admitted, however, that the chances are better than even that the spinners of these tales are themselves engaged in the thriving smuggling trade which, for centuries, has been a mainstay of Howth's economy.

Howth has not changed much since the stormy autumn day when a battered sailing vesssel, with ripped sails and damaged prow, limped toward the narrow stone jetty in the harbor. From this ship emerged an extraordinary figure, a woman of sixty-three, well over six feet in height, dressed in a flowing saffron cape, her long black hair flowing loose over her shoulders. Her eyes were black and glittering, her skin weathered to the color and texture of dried oak bark, her hands calloused by the constant use of oars. Her back was ramrod straight and there was a look of dignity about her, combined with an untrammelled primitive power.

This woman was Grainne O'Maille later to be celebrated in Irish poetry and folksongs as "Queen of the Ocean Isles" and chronicled in English history as "Grace O'Malley, the most notorious woman pirate ever to rove the seas." Already Grainne had assumed the proportions of a legend in her native land. Her father, Owen O'Maille, better known as "The Black Oak of Aran", had been the chieftain of the powerful clan O'Maille whose territory in North-West Ireland stretched from Galway Bay to Malin Head. Upon his death succession should have fallen to his oldest son. But Grainne, then nineteen, had challenged her brother to "a battle of the knives" for the leadership. The battle, fought with heavy ten-inch blades, had taken place at midnight in a sandy cove lying between two sheer rock cliffs on the shore of Clare Island, the stronghold of the O'Maille clan. Grainne had emerged victorious and was the only women ever to be proclaimed Chieftain of an Irish clan.

At this time Clan O'Maille was engaged in a relentless war with the English and other invaders of the island. They were primarily pirates and, under Grainne's fearless leadership, they became the scourge of the seas so that no ship of any nationality was safe in approaching Ireland's North-West passages.

Grainne herself led these ma-

rauding parties and, according to contemporary historians, she was always first to board the deck of a prize with "two blunder-busses in either hand". On the day before the birth of her first son, Grainne accompanied her warriors in an assault on a Turkish corsair off Slyne Head. As customary, the clansmen used tiny coracles, made of animal hides stretched across light wooden frames, in the attack. The corsair's heavy guns drove back the coracles and sunk several of them. Grainne, enraged by the ineptness of her crew, rose from her bed, boarded a coracle and, with two of her men, raced toward the larger vessel. As she did so, she stood up in the coracle, screaming, cursing and brandishing her fists like a crazed woman.

The Turks, nonplussed by this performance, permitted the coracle to pass under the prow of their ship. Grainne seized a rope and swung herself aboard. Once on deck she began a wild, gyrating Irish jig, stamping her feet, swirling her saffron cloak, shouting and prancing. The officers, amused by these strange antics, gathered around in a circle, chortling and shouting encouragement and ribald jokes. Without warning, Grainne whirled about and, drawing two pistols from beneath her flowing cape, shot two of the officers dead. Before the shock of the incident wore off, the corsair's decks were swarming with O'Maille clansmen, and the corsair, laden with wines and spices, fell an easy prey to the pirates. As the years passed, Grainne O'Maille became an increasing challenge to England's vaunted seapower. Time and again expeditions were sent to track her down and to destroy the threat of Clan O'Maille. However, Carrigahowly Castle, the massive stone fortress which she had built on Clare Island, was virtually impregnable. It rose, a great box-like structure, two hundred and fifty feet above the waves that surged about the rocky foundations. To defend the castle Grainne ordered her men to trundle huge boulders up the steep stone steps to the roof. Here she also kept gigantic caldrons, vats of water and stores of fire-wood. As soon as one of the marauding bands was sighted, she would order fires to be lit. She would then wait patiently until the invaders had landed and reached the foot of the castle. At her signal, the clansmen stationed about the parapets would suddenly deluge the attackers with scalding water and pelt them with boulders and stones hurled from giant slings. No invader was ever known to reach the inner keep. Those who survived Grainne's initial onslaught were only too happy to make their escape.

With repeated successes, Grainne grew bolder and her

fleet of coracles ranged to Ireland's southern tip. Although the walled city of Galway remained in English hands, Grainne was ruler of all the land to the north. To consolidate her power, she built fortresses at strategic points along the coast. Eventually there were nineteen of these, each modelled on Carrigahowly Castle. Grainne captured many large ships but most of these were put to the torch as she preferred her coracles, for purposes of piracy. Often her fleet numbered as many as fifty of these miniature craft and Grainne devised a novel way of keeping them intact. In each of the castles a hole was drilled through the masonry of the chamber where she slept. A heavy rope was drawn through this hole. Each night, before retiring, Grainne attached one end of this rope to her ankle. At the other end of the rope the fleet was tied, the coracles moored in such a way that if an enemy should tamper with them or one of her warriors should attempt to desert, she would be awakened and ready to take instant action.

By 1953, the English had given up hope of trying to rout Grainne from her native soil and instead decided to woo her. Queen Elizabeth sent her a letter of full pardon and an invitation to attend her court in London. Grainne's audience with the Queen was filled with ludicrous situations. Grainne chewed snuff, spat in a lace handkerchief offered her by the Queen, ridiculed her Majesty's lap-dog and scornfully rejected an English title. It was on her return trip to Clare Island that Grainne put in at Howth. Her frail ship had battled unremitting storms for two days and she was exhausted, cold and hungry. She made her way on foot to the high walls surrounding the estate of the Lord of Howth to ask for food and a place to rest.

At the inner gates she was stopped by the guards who informed her that the Lord and his retinue were at dinner and could not be disturbed. Her vehement protests were of no avail. She was turned away.

Grainne was outraged by this lack of hospitality. Although she regarded piracy as a legitimate trade, she was fantastically punctillious in matters of honor. Throughout her life she had rigorously adhered to the Gaelic concept of hospitality towards strangers. Once when a group of her men, without her knowledge, had slain two travellers who had sought sanctuary at one of her castles, Grainne was mortified. As a penance for her failure to provide hospitality, she had walked barefoot for eighty miles along the rocky Irish roads until she reached Clew Bay. From here she was transported to Clare Island, going to the chapel

which she had erected, she ordered two of the lay brothers to flog her. Kneeling, with bared back before the altar, she had insisted that she be whipped with leather thongs in which beads of metal were embedded and she refused to give permission for the flogging to be stopped until she was beaten into unconsciousness.

Holding such convictions, her fury at the treatment provided her by the Lord of Howth is not difficult to understand. Mumbling and muttering, she started back through the outer gates. Just outside she espied a nurse-maid playing with a blond, curly-haired boy of eight. Striking up a conversation with the nurse, she learned that the boy was the heir of Howth. The child, frightened by her rumbling voice and piercing eyes, clung tightly to the nurse and began to cry. Grainne pried him out of the girl's arms and, ignoring the screams of both the nurse and the boy, carried him on board her ship and promptly set sail for Clare Island.

Upon her arrival she dispatched a messenger to the Lord of Howth, informing him that she was holding his son for ransom. Howth responded that he was willing to pay any sum which she demanded. Grainne was contemptuous of money. The ransom which she exacted was this: The Lord of Howth must swear an oath that he and all his heirs in perpetuum would keep the gates of Howth Castle open during mealtimes and that at every meal a plate should be set for the unexpected guest. Should this pledge be refused, Grainne informed him, his son would be raised on Clare Island among the O'Mailles, where he would learn the true meaning of Irish hospitality.

Needless to say, Howth eagerly accepted these terms for the return of his son. An Irish oath is no trifling matter and even today, as the author of this article can personally testify, no meal is ever served in Howth Castle without a place being set and a chair drawn up for the guest who may arrive unexpectedly.

On Clare Island too the spirit of Grainne O'Maille still prevails. The tiny, rugged, windswept isle is accessible only by a small motor launch, and the infrequent visitor may find himself stranded for days, even weeks, before the heavy rolling seas of the channel subside sufficiently to permit his safe return to the mainland. But while he is there he can be assured that there will be no dearth of hospitality. Carrigahowly Castle has been turned into a sheepfold and the cathedral which Grainne erected has sunken deep into the earth so that it can be entered only through the upper windows. Its

unique dome of hand-stained glass, wrought with the curious designs of Erse mythology, has become blurred with the years. But the handful of islanders, O'Mailles all, will drop in during the evening to ply the guest with exquisite brandy smuggled in from Spain and to talk with worshipful reverence of Grainne O'Maille.

Her body, they say, was buried at sea and her voice and spirit are still carried by the wind and spray, imparting her fierce pride, her courage and integrity throughout the world to every person who has a single drop of Irish blood singing in his veins.

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what's new in crime

by . . . Stefan Santesson

Eight days after a Cessna light plane had disappeared from an airfield near Perth, a Yugoslav migrant staggered into the Ethel Creek cattle station seven hundred miles northeast of Perth, exhausted and unable to talk coherently.

Detectives brought him to Perth. After he had been questioned, a search party was sent out from Ethel Creek in a four-wheel drive vehicle. Two aboriginal trackers accompanied the party on the long trek through the bush, men noted for their ability to follow trails others would consider invisible.

Slowly, slowly, back-tracking along the Yugoslav's trail, they finally came to the plane at a point one hundred and eighty miles east of Ethel Creek. He had crash landed there and then staggered through the brush for days until he had finally come upon the cattle station.

The only tracks near the plane were those the police party had retraced.

This is the world of Detective Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte that we have known throughout these past decades from Arthur Upfield's novels. Not this particular incident, it is true, but

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Mr. Santesson, editor of this magazine since 1956 and former editor, between 1945 and 1952, of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, continues his column of comment on recent mystery and suspense novels and other material of interest to readers of this magazine.

time after time Bony has nodded his head thoughtfully as the man he was talking to not only described—and did so accurately — the man Bony was hunting, doing so from the tracks before them, but would go on to detail the temper, and even the deeds, of this man whom he himself would never have seen.

I have often insisted that there are novels in this field which if studied, a hundred years from now, would describe to anyone interested what we are like and what makes us tick in these years that have seen us reach out for the stars. These novels, which are in effect social-documentary portraits of these times, lose nothing by the writers' attention to details which help to make more credible, more believable if you wish, what happens between hunter and the hunted.

These novels by Arthur W. Upfield, from THE MYSTERY OF SWORDFISH REEF, DEATH OF A SWAGMAN, THE DEVIL'S STEPS, and particularly THE BONE IS POINTED, and now THE WILL OF THE TRIBE (Doubleday, $3.50), are in this writer's considered opinion close to being source materials on the ways and on the thinking of the peoples so loosely grouped together — and dismissed — as the aborigines of Australia. I would therefore recommend these novels, without exception, to anyone who would like to know about the people, both aborigines and settlers, who live outside of the great cities that seem to us to BE Australia — no more so, of course, than New York or Chicago can be said to BE this country . . .

It is sometimes forgotten that these men and these women who are a part of the desert and bush that is much of Australia, do have their own ways and their own traditions—and their own mores. Bonaparte, whose roots are in both communities, is obviously aware of this and of the pressure upon the aborigines, including the Tribe with which he has now to deal, to in a sense compromise and to begin to assimilate with this other race which the younger men secretly consider unworthy of accepting them.

Strange thoughts? There are new winds blowing in the East, after all, and there are many who are all too ready to point out how the aborigine was in Australia before the white man came there, and that when the white man has gone he will still be there. In this country there is a variation on this theme . . . Detective Inspector Bonaparte, originally sent to discover who had killed the white man whose body had been found in a meteor crater in the middle of the desert, eventually does discover who had killed this man who had as his mission to stir up the

tribes against the whites.

Things are not quite the same when he finally is about to leave. They will never be quite the same. And we have reason to agree with Anthony Boucher, in a New York *Times* book review, "There is no other professional p o l i c e m a n . . . whose next case I await so eagerly . . .".

There is only one thing which puzzles me. No! Two things!

When *will* Collier Books reprint the early Upfields, long out of print?

And when *will* some whom we can all think of get around to thanking Isabelle Taylor, of the Crime Club, who for so many years has had the vision and the courage to publish books such as these Upfield novels?

Don't miss THE WILL OF THE TRIBE!

Frances and Richard Lockridge's THE TICKING CLOCK (Lippincott, $3.50) is the fiftieth novel by the two writers who are of course best known for their novels about Mr. and Mrs. North and about Captain Heimrich (the latest Captain Heimrich novel, FIRST COME, FIRST KILL, was discussed l a s t month). As A n t h o n y Boucher has had occasion to point out, "The versatility of Frances and Richard Lockridge knows almost no bounds." There has been repeated confirmation of this in the past and now, in this latest novel, and in their own approach to the thinking and the methodology (if such a word can be used) of kidnappers, the Lockridges do it again. Constance D a l e ' s blundering into what at first appears to be the perfect hiding place for a child that a hitherto efficiently organized kidnapping ring has just snatched, results in some breathless moments for Constance — and for the kidnapped child. Don't miss this!

Aaron Marc Stein's newest Matt Erridge novel, HOME & MURDER (Doubleday, $3.50), the action of much of which takes place in the V i r g i n Islands, has apparently been written with one eye on the paperbacks. There is no other explanation for Mr. Stein's departure from the paths of literate rectitude, in jazzing up Matt Erridge's encounters with some "bad boys" and some decidedly unconvincing disciples of the Fidelista school of action. Those of you who remember Mr. Stein's earlier novels, many laid in a Yucatan which he knows so well, will flinch. Those of you who do not remember them will, on the other hand, enjoy this unorthodox glimpse of the back streets in the Virgin Islands — and points nearer home.

Jeremy York's TWO FOR THE M O N E Y (Doubleday, $2.95) will also seem something of a departure for those readers

who have come to expect, in a York novel, effortless ease in plotting and characterization. Somehow this isn't so here. Marion Shaw has never met her American cousin, Cliff Benyon, co-inheritor with her, though neither know it at the outset, of a million dollars, and it is logical that she should not sense that the stranger who meets her, on her arrival in Nice, is not this cousin, but a man who's just seen to his murder. There is the familiar attention to detail throughout the novel, but somehow the false Cliff Benyon and his associates never quite become three-dimensional personalities, men whom you can accept as people who might perhaps exist. It is hard to believe in these people . . .

A friend has commented on my discussion, in our September issue, of Joachim Joesten's interesting THE RED HAND (Abelard-Schuman, $3.95). You will recall that I felt that Mr. Joesten, perhaps unintentionally, appeared to feel that these men and these women whose cause was that of the O.A.S. spoke, in a sense, for Metropolitan France.

This is of course an oversimplification.

Let me put it this way. There is no denying that there were Frenchmen who, for a variety of reasons, worked with Petain and Laval. But it is a matter of history that there were also Frenchmen, thousands and thousands of them, who fought with the Free French and who died for those principles for which DeGaulle, then as now, stood! It is not just that what these men and these women did, and what these men and these women sacrificed, should be forgotten in an almost Freudian preoccupation with the treachery of the few.

Similarly, there have of course been men and women in the Algieria that is now Free, who have fought DeGaulle's decision for Peace because this appeared to them to be the final surrender of all that meant Life to them, and because this decision seemed to rob them of their homes and of the land which they had come to consider their own.

But again, with no disrespect to the sincerity of the few among these, and with due recognition of the frustrated bitterness of the others, it must be pointed out that this is a minority viewpoint and that these men and that these women who have done what we all know they have done emphatically do NOT speak for France.

Mr. Joesten is as objective on this subject as have been some writers abroad, in the past (and some at home too, for that matter) who ascribed an undue importance, nationally, to men such as Capone and to the businessmen who were for some time organized as Murder, Inc.

Daniel Broun's COUNTERWEIGHT (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.50) is one of the few novels (I read it in a sitting the other afternoon) which does live up to the publisher's description of it, in this case as an "entertaining, fast-paced mystery with a Broadway background." The author, new to this field, is uniquely qualified to write about theatrical life. He has been a stage manager (and an assistant) for ten years, and has apparently lived through many of the crises reported on in the course of the action as members of the company of *I'd Walk a Mile,* a musical that has survived the Philadelphia tryout and then heads for Broadway, cope with threatened union trouble — and with the murder of the most-disliked member of the company. Don't miss this. But don't start wondering about either Cory Kelly or Louis Carreau. I have a feeling you *will* meet them both again. But not necessarily in Shubert Alley.

Joan Fleming's WHEN I GROW RICH (Ives Washburn, $3.50), will disturb the many for whom Istanbul means "intrigue and international spies" and a "tradition of dark history."

This is of course a nonsense-generalization that can be mouthed about any major city, about London or Paris or Vienna or Budapest or Riga or Edinburgh — or for that matter about cities in this country — with blithe unconcern for the reality that while this can perhaps be said of the few, the vast majority of people in these cities can live all their lives without any knowledge of or awareness of what goes on elsewhere in the same town. Or interest in what goes on . . .

This is essentially a story about such people, about Nuri Bey, a young Turkish intellectual, who is more interested in his manuscripts and in philosophy than in what is happening in the world about him, and about the others whose ordered lives (or less ordered lives) are thrown into considerable confusion by what happens to Madame Miasma (a lovely name!) when Justice catches up with her . . .

Make no mistake about this. Nuri Bey's reactions are not the reactions of a trained conspirator. He has lived too long with his books and with his dreams to ever be this. But he is a Turkish gentleman, with a Turkish gentleman's often fascinating ability to cope with all sorts of situations in a manner vouchsafed only to *effendim* (you are correct — I am not thinking solely of "Nuri Bey" when I say this . . .), and Allah is generally tolerant and well-disposed towards these occasionally less than orthodox Muslimin.

Madame Miasma, whose orig-

inal fall from grace, to put it mildly, provides the reason for much of these happenings, is a singularly life-like portrait of a phenomenon the East, in these past decades, has known all too well. The breakdown of a system of society which housed and fed — and occasionally strangled — such personalities, may or may not be justified in History. The administrative decadence and corruption, the hundred-year-old absence of contact between rulers and the ruled, admittedly did not argue for the preservation of ways of living the reasons for which had long been forgotten, but what then came after those who died or were driven into exile occasionally causes one to wonder if the changes were for the better.

In Turkey — and elsewhere — there have been women such as Madame Miasma, grasping, evil with an absence of awareness of it that is rarer in less realistic societies, and desperate as disasters crowd in upon them. This is a beautifully drawn character, just as Nuri Bey is an attractive personality and equally credible. Don't miss this!

You are less aware of Gridley Nelson, and more of the thoroughly unpleasant Mike Carmody and his "sweet setup," than you have been in Ruth Fenisong's earlier novels about Captain Gridley Nelson. But DEAD WEIGHT (Doubleday, $3.50), apart from being a uniquely graphic glimpse into the world of reducing salons for over-weight and wealthy women, is a story of murder—and the motives for murder—that will hold you.

Simon Harvester, whose publishers bill him as "that impeccable chronicler of espionage and dark doings in contemporary Asia" (no Asian testimonials to this are given . . .) now takes us to Japan in THE COPPER BUTTERFLY (Walker, $3.50). Some of the characters, particularly the Russian spies, will remind some of *The Thriller* in the mid-Thirties. The honeymooning couple who blunder into this comedy of mayhem and assorted skulduggery are attractive enough, the background and the Japanese met with are interesting, but the story — the story is incredible . . .

As for Lawrence Meynell's SATURDAY OUT (Walker, $2.95), this is a rather curious excursion into the-town-with-a-dread-secret field. It is pleasant enough, but also not too believable.

mrs. block contributes

by E. Phillips Oppenheim

"That horrible woman!" Madelon exclaimed, gripping Mr. Billingham's arm, as they sat in a retired corner of the Sporting Club bar.

"She is indeed deplorable," the Marquis agreed, from the other side. "Today, at one of the tables in the Casino, before the opening of the Cercle Prive, she created a scene. She plastered the board with plaques. She utterly failed to remember. She claimed everything. Her voice—a horrible memory! The croupiers had no choice. They gave in. She took what she wished. When she departed everyone was overjoyed."

"She carries some of the stuff about her," Mr. Billingham observed judicially. "Fine woman in her day!"

The woman to whom they referred, Mrs. William Block, of Leeds, England, stood looking around for a seat, and finding none, s c o w l e d. She was florid, fat, notwithstanding the desperate efforts of a world-famed costumier, and vulgar. She swung in her hand a gold bag, adorned with p r e c i o u s

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E. Phillips Oppenheim is often thought of as the rapporteur of the doings, at times extra legal, of those for whom Monte Carlo, Cannes, Biarritz and certain clubs in London, were the boundaries of a world that paid little attention to what went on elsewhere. This is unjust, as the present portrait of "that woman" should prove . . . H. S. S.

From: E. Phillips Oppenheim: MR. BILLINGHAM, THE MARQUIS & MADELON
(Little Brown, 1932)
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stones. She wore upon her person two pearl necklaces, a pair of large diamond ear-rings, a succession of diamond bracelets, and several glittering hat-pins. Her costume was w h i t e and bulgy. She was a well-known *habitante* of the Hotel de Paris, whose friends were sycophants and whose acquaintances fugitive, and she was reputed to be the widow of a leather merchant who had made a million pounds in hides.

"She is one of the people," Madelon confided, "who upset all my ideas of conventional morality. I should like to rob her."

The Marquis dropped his eyeglass and twirled the corner of his moustache.

"It is an idea," he admitted.

Mr. Billingham considered the matter.

"If one could h a t c h out a deal," he confessed, "I guess this is a case where one would not need to be too darned particular. That woman don't deserve to be allowed to go about alive, looking the way she does, and with half-a-million dollars' worth of jewels missing their opportunity in life."

Madelon smiled up at him in intriguing fashion.

"Do something about it, Mr. Billingham," she begged. "You are already in favour with her. Do you not remember giving her your seat yesterday evening?"

"Say, that don't c o u n t for much," Mr. Billingham protested. "She was leaning over me with a kind of blend of lily of the valley and patchouli scent, pretty well stifling me, brushing my hair the wrong way, pushing her plaques on and shouting out her stakes till I was glad enough to make myself scarce."

"Nevertheless," Madelon reminded him in a whisper, "you gave her your place, and she is smiling at you now."

It was an incontrovertible fact. Madelon rose to her feet with a graceful movement.

"I have an idea that there is a place for me at my favourite table," she confided. "I go to see."

Mrs. William Block advanced a few steps and beamed at Mr. Billingham. He rose at once.

"Vous desirez une chaise, madame?" he demanded.

"I'll sit down all right," the lady replied, dropping heavily into the c h a i r, "but I ain't French. Waiter, I'll have a gin fizz."

"An excellent d r i n k!" Mr. Billingham murmured.

"I like a glass of champagne most times," the lady confided, "but I'll have to drink so much for dinner that perhaps I'd better lay off for a while. I'm dining with the Higginsons—Jim Higginson and his wife. You know them, I dare say."

The Marquis felt himself included in the query. He shook his head.

"I have not the honour," he murmured.

"Can't say that I know them," Mr. Billingham confessed.

"Jim's father made his money in woolens at Huddersfield," the lady explained, "and Jim got into that c o t t o n scheme somehow . . . Why," she went on, smiling at Mr. Billingham, "you must be the gentleman who gave me his seat yesterday evening."

"I had that pleasure," Mr. Billingham admitted.

The Marquis rose stealthily to his feet. He was fond of his friend, he was very fond of his niece, but like all real aristocrats he was in his way a snob. He did not care to sit next to Mrs. William Block.

"I'll wait for you," he explained, with a wave of his hand. "I have an affair . . ."

"Jumpy little person, your friend," Mrs. Block remarked. "Never mind! All the more room for us. Where are you staying, Mr. — Mr. — what is your name?"

Mr. Billingham produced a card.

"My n a m e is Billingham, ma'am," he said — "Samuel T. Billingham of New York. I was interested in linoleums but I've sold out."

"Retired, eh?" the lady remarked.

"That's how you put it over here," Mr. Billingham conceded cautiously. "I'm not saying that I'm right out of the game yet."

"My name's Block," the lady confided — "Annie Block. My husband was in hides. Nasty dirty things, I always thought, but he made a cool million at it."

"Pounds?" Mr. Billingham enquired, in an awed tone.

"Pounds sterling," was the definite reply. "None of your silly dollars!"

"I t r u s t," Mr. Billingham continued, "that your husband remembered to whose inspiration his success was due?"

"I don't know what you're getting at," Mrs. Block observed, "but if you want to know what he did with his money, I'll tell you straight, he left it to me. It will cost you one bob at Somerset House to find out that I ain't a liar, and if you happen to k n o w a word or two of French, just rub it into that flunkey there that a lady does not want to wait for a gin fizz half the evening."

Mr. Billingham proved equal to the occasion. The gin fizz was produced, and the lady, notwithstanding her colossal inheritance, showed not the slightest objection to her companion paying for it. They conversed for a time with growing intimacy.

"Are you married?" she asked, a little abruptly.

Mr. Billingham scorned the suggestion.

"Put it off till too l a t e, I guess — a great mistake!"

She sighed, and scrutinized him benignly.

"What do you mean by 'too late'?" she demanded. "You're in the prime of life."

Mr. Billingham shook his head gloomily.

"I am healthy," he admitted. "I'm only just round the corner of fifty, but I guess I'm still a little particular. The women I care for seem to want something younger."

"Rubbish!" the lady asserted.

"Take your own case now," he went on earnestly. "You are a widow, I understand. You are bound to marry again — anyone can see that. You wouldn't care to have anything to do with a man of my age."

Mrs. William Block laid four chubby fingers and a fat thumb upon his arm. So far as her double chin would allow her, she looked arch.

"You are a funny person!" she declared. "Come on—I dare you! Ask me, now. I might be tempted."

Mr. Billingham bore the assault stoically.

"If I did make such an idiot of myself," he observed, "I know very well what would happen, and so do you."

"I'd have you," she assured him.

Mr. Billingham contemplated that wonderful array of jewellery with which she was decked, remembered his pledge to Madelon, heaved a deep sigh, and permitted himself to touch the massive arm which leaned against his.

"What are you doing for luncheon tomorrow?" he asked.

"That depends upon what you want me to do," was the brilliant reply.

At the end of the week Mr. Billingham had lost half a stone. He escaped one morning from the Hotel de Paris at an early hour and met his friends, the Marquis de Felan and Madelon his niece, at one of the smaller cafes at the back of the town.

"Someone else," he complained, "will have to take a hand in this game."

The Marquis stroked his moustache.

"My turn, I gather," he observed, "is to come later."

"What can I do, dear man?" Madelon asked, patting his hand. "I am here. I am anxious to help. I must confess that at first I watched your sufferings with heart-felt sympathy. Lately I am not so sure. You are either getting callous, or you are becoming an admirer of the gargantuan in my sex."

Mr. Billingham groaned.

"Listen," he announced; "we approach the end. I am veritably the accepted suitor of Mrs. Annie Block, widow of a defunct dealer in hides. The million is in her own name."

"It is incredible!" the Marquis declared.

"A million? It is worth the trouble?" Madelon murmured inscrutably.

Mr. Billingham smiled for the

first time for days; a smile that spread and e x t e n d e d to the wrinkles around his eyes.

"Well," he continued, "I guess I'm about t h r o u g h with my part. It is your uncle who takes the floor now."

The Marquis coughed.

"But s u p p o s i n g the lady should object to this—er—substitution of attentions?"

Mr. Billingham's smile broadened.

"I should worry," he murmured. "Play your part as I have played mine, Marquis — and there must be no shirking, mind — and the thing is accomplished. This morning we meet at the Cafe de Paris and I shall present you. Then I talk to Madelon. The rest — well — some cinch, I can tell you!"

The Marquis was a little uneasy. He was haunted with visions of a magenta dress which the lady had worn on the previous evening.

"I am not sure," he ventured, "whether my methods may appeal."

Mr. Billingham s t r u c k the little table with his fist.

"See h e r e," he announced, "it's a closed pocket-book on this trip if you show the white feather. The game's as easy as Boston pie. You've got to sail right in. I come along with the finesse later. Madelon!"

She nodded understandingly.

"Uncle," she w a r n e d him, "remember that everything depends upon your playing your part properly. You want to have something to take to the Casino tomorrow, don't you?"

The Marquis breathed a deep sigh. He seemed to be able to visualize the moment of suspense, the click of the ball falling into its niche, the croupier's monotonous announcement. He drew himself up.

"I am a man of honour," he declared. "I shall not fail you. Let us start at once . . ."

Outside the Cafe de Paris, seated before the most conspicuous table, and looking larger than ever, they found the lady of whom they were in search. Mr. Billingham marched boldly up.

"Mrs. Block," he said, "my friend, the Marquis de Felan, has asked me to present him. The Marquis de Felan — Mrs. Block — also Miss de Felan the Marquis' niece."

Mrs. Block was fluttered but gratified. The M a r q u i s rose splendidly to the occasion. He kissed her pudgy fingers with an air which evoked her wondering admiration, and accepting a c h a i r by her side he plunged at once into a conversation of a more or less intimate nature. He played the host to the little gathering, ordering refreshments and paying for them with an air of great liberality. After a time Mr. Billingham rose tentatively to his feet.

"I guess Miss de Felan and I are going to walk along and see about that table for dinner,"

he announced. "We'll find you here when we come back, or else meet in the Casino."

Mrs. Block smiled gracefully; the Marquis for a moment felt his heart sink, but he stuck to his guns.

"A very delightful man, Mr. Billingham," the lady remarked, looking after his departing figure.

The Marquis nodded without enthusiasm.

"Why not?" he replied. "He has in the world all that he desires. He has money, and above all he has a facile disposition. It is a great thing, that! He makes friends easily. He never suffers from loneliness."

"And do you?" the lady asked softly.

The Marquis sighed. He looked dreamily away towards the hills. He was quite at his best.

"All my life," he confided, "I have been lonely. I lost my wife when I was young. I was foolish not to remarry. Now, alas! when it is too late, I feel the need of a companion."

"Why is it too late?" she enquired tenderly.

"The women of today," the Marquis complained, "all prefer young men. Where should I find a woman attractive enough to be agreeable to me who would be willing to marry a man of fifty?"

"Very easily, I should think," Mrs. Block declared with portentous emphasis. "But of course if you want one of these young fly-away hussies—"

"But I do not," the Marquis interrupted. "I prefer a woman of—of experience. A woman," he went on, leaning a little towards her—"may I venture to say — of something like your age — thirty-eight or so."

It was a moment of ecstasy for Mrs. Block. She was wearing a gown in which she fondly believed that she resembled the mannequin from whom she had bought it. She was sitting alone with a Marquis and quite casually she had been taken for thirty-eight.

"How did you know my age?" she asked, almost archly.

"I am a great diviner of ages," he replied. "It is very seldom that I make a mistake."

"Well, then, I think there are very few women of my age, Marquis," the lady confided, "who would not be glad to try and bring a little sunshine into your life."

The Marquis sighed once more.

"A beautiful way of putting it!" he murmured. "You cheer me up, dear lady. May I," he added significantly, "do myself the honour of calling upon you?"

Mrs. Block was more and more fluttered.

"Come this afternoon," she invited. "I have tea in my sitting-room at four o'clock. Mr. Billingham sometimes drops in, but this afternoon I shall say that I am engaged."

"Mr. Billingham is a great friend of yours, is he not?" the Marquis enquired gloomily.

"Nothing special," was the indifferent reply. "We're friends in a way, of course, but he's not quite my fancy. By the by," she went on, "are you and your niece doing anything tonight?"

"Nothing of any consequence," the Marquis confessed.

"Come and dine at my hotel —the Hotel de Paris," the lady begged eagerly. "Mr. Billingham's coming, and to tell you the truth, I'd just as soon not dine with him alone. He is very nice, but people do talk so, and when you've made up your mind as I have—well, I don't want to seem to be encouraging him. You *comprenez?*"

"*Parfaitement,*" the Marquis assured her with a little inward chuckle. "About half-past eight, I suppose. Permit me to escort you across the Place . . . ."

The Marquis strolled down the terrace to Ciro's a little later with the remains of a smile still lurking about his lips He handed his coat and cane to an attendant and crossed the room confidently towards the table where Madelon and Mr. Billingham were already seated.

"My friend," he announced, "you no longer exist. I have achieved a great success. La belle Block is no longer for you. I take tea with her in her *salon* this afternoon. You are to be told that she is engaged. We dine at the Hotel de Paris tonight—Madelon and I. A million pounds! It is incredible! One might be disposed to take this affair seriously."

Madelon shook her head.

"Impossible," she insisted. "You may eat her dinners and rob her if you will of that staggering jewelry, but more would not be possible."

The Marquis shivered a little as he glanced down the menu.

"You are right," he assented. "Besides, even if one had the courage, there would be disagreeable people like executors. You might find that there were difficulties about the money and settlements."

"The man who marries a woman like that," Mr. Billingham declared firmly, "would deserve what he got, and I guess we'll leave that out of the question. She's one of the people in the world, though, the Lord meant to be robbed. She goes about asking for it."

"The scheme itself is as yet scarcely clear to me," the Marquis murmured.

"Nor to me," Mr. Billingham confessed, attacking his *hors d'oeuvres* vigorously. "The stuff's there all right, though, and we're going to touch it. Make the running as strong as you can this afternoon, my son. We'll get to work before the week's out."

The Marquis played with his eyeglass a little nervously.

"You will not suggest, of

course, anything in the nature of—er—direct larceny?"

"Not I," Mr. Billingham acquiesced. "Jewel lifting's too difficult, and besides, we ain't professionals. Something a little more subtle. I haven't got it quite fixed yet, but I'm not worrying any."

The Marquis escaped from his afternoon tea entertainment, still triumphant but shattered. He drank a large whisky and soda at the bar of the Sporting Club before he felt sufficiently recovered to make his appearance in the Rooms. By dinner-time, however, he was entirely himself again. He sat at Mrs. Blocks right hand, and endured stoically the pressure of her immense foot. The burden of conversation devolved mainly upon him, for Mr. Billingham was noticeably silent, and, for him, almost morose.

"Jealous!" his hostess whispered to the Marquis as they left the dining-room. "Jealous of you, dear!"

The Marquis felt his fingers lightly pressed and received a languishing glance.

"You have encouraged him," he rejoined.

"Not more than others," she declared, airily and mendaciously peopling her environment with the forms of many suitors. "Men are so difficult nowadays," she sighed.

"A beautiful woman has always her embarrassments," the Marquis sympathized....

The evening progressed according to plan. The little party had made their way to the Sporting Club, but Mr. Billingham, becoming more and more silent and depressed, presently withdrew. Madelon followed shortly afterwards and in a little voiture they drove to the Carlton. Mr. Billingham's depression had vanished as though by magic.

"Say, your uncle is getting away with this fine!" he declared. "It took me a week to get where he's got in less than a day. He's got the knack of it."

Madelon was looking up at the moon. Mr. Billingham was suddenly conscious that the night held a charm which was not altogether pagan. The sky was perfectly clear, the music from the cafes reached them faintly, in the dim light the crowds of moving people were like shadows.

"After all," she murmured, "it is rather terrible."

"I don't quite get you," her companion confessed.

"Having to live like this," she explained. "This living on one's wits. The insecurity of it is horrible. Sometimes it is amusing, it appeals to one's sense of humour, but it destroys one's dignity. In time we shall all three become really bad."

"Not you," Mr. Billingham rejoined softly.

"Why not me?" she asked, turning abruptly and looking at

him. "What do you suppose will be the end of me?"

"I guess you'll marry."

"Who would marry anyone like me—who worth marrying?" she demanded, with a little note almost of passion in her tone. "Of course I want to marry—every girl does. I want a home of my own and a man to look after me. What sort of a husband do you think I am likely to find living this kind of a life?"

Mr. Billingham, too, was very serious.

"I guess it's hard on you," he admitted, taking her hand in his.

"It is hard on all of us, I suppose."

"Say, shall we lay off a bit," he suggested. "I can make money on the square. There's my old Company. They'd have me back as a Director."

She withdrew her fingers and patted his hand.

"You are very foolish," she said. "Of course you can make money. You are clever—but that would not help us. We could not live upon your charity. And yet, without you we should probably slip back into helplessness."

Mr. Billingham leaned toward her and coughed. His voice was a little husky.

"Madelon," he began.

She turned her head.

"Well?"

The carriage pulled up with a jerk outside the Carlton; the commissionaire threw open the door.

"Damn!" Mr. Billingham exclaimed.

At supper-time Madelon became unexpectedly gay. She insisted upon dancing most of the time and resisted any attempt at serious conversation.

"Of course you know that you dance absurdly well," she told him once. "You must be very fond of it."

"For a fat man," Mr. Billingham admitted, as he wiped his forehead, "I fancy I can move some. But dancing with you, Miss Madelon, is pretty easy going. Let's sit and talk for a bit now."

She shook her head.

"I could not," she objected. "Tonight I am nervous. If I talk I shall weep. Go and fetch me that dancing instructor—the dark one. You will have to give him a hundred francs. I like that little side-step he does. You can either rest or try your fortune with the little danseuse."

Mr. Billingham obeyed orders so far as the dancing instructor was concerned, but made no effort towards securing the companionship of the little danseuse. Instead, he leaned back in his corner and watched. He seemed to be watching all the room, but as a matter of fact his eyes never left Madelon. She was very simply dressed, as usual, in a plain black georgette frock, but there seemed to be some new quality in her face—

something a little haunting in her eyes, a dash almost of recklessness in her graceful movements. She danced like a devotee, without a word to her partner. Once her eyes met Mr. Billingham's and she smiled, but even her smile seemed to possess an indefinable and unrealizable quality. As soon as the dance had finished she thanked her partner briefly and returned abruptly to the table.

"I want to go, please," she begged. "We will see how uncle is getting on."

Mr. Billingham paid his bill. They stepped outside and into a voiture. Mr. Billingham's voice was once more a little husky.

"Madelon," he began——

She laid her hand for a moment on his.

"You must please not speak to me all the way back," she insisted. "And don't mind if I am a little foolish."

Her head disappeared between her hands. Once he saw her shoulders shiver as though she were sobbing. When they reached the Club, however, she sat up with a little weary smile. There were no signs of tears in her eyes.

"You see, after all I am not a finished adventuress," she said. "I am just a silly girl, who is liable to these sort of moods. I think being with this horrible woman has affected me tonight. I hate ugly things and ugly people. If we continue our life of crime I insist upon it that our next victim is not of this type."

Mrs. Block was, for her, almost nervous when on the following afternoon, in response to an urgent telephone call, she received a visit from Mr. Billingham. Mr. Billingham seemed to have lost entirely that spirit of bonhomie which he generally presented to the world. Even his attire was more sombre than usual. He shook hands without a smile and declined a chair.

"Annie," he said, using her Christian name boldly, "I have come for an explanation."

"What sort of an explanation?" she enquired, toying with her rope of pearls.

"I guess you know," was the stern reply. "We Americans don't waste words. You know very well you're engaged to marry me and you're flirting with my friend. It's got to stop right now!"

The situation had its embarrassments, but also its delights. Mrs. Block felt a thrill of joy as she once more invited her visitor to seat himself by her side. She had all the sensations of a heroine of some modern romance.

"Samuel," she said—"or rather, Mr. Billingham, because I am not going to call you Samuel any longer—you will have to be very generous. I wish to break off our engagement. It was never announced, as you know."

"Because of the Marquis?"

Mrs. Block admitted the fact.

"It's no use wasting words about it," she went on. "I promised to marry him last night. We're keeping the engagement secret for a fortnight and then I'm going back to England to arrange my affairs."

"And what do you expect me to say?" Mr. Billingham asked.

"I expect you to be a dear and —give me up," she declared.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," he replied firmly.

"You can't hold me to that promise," she insisted. "There's nothing on paper, anyway. You wouldn't have me marry you without loving you, Samuel?"

Mr. Billingham flinched but persevered.

"You are engaged to marry me," he rejoined doggedly. "I may not be an aristocrat like the Marquis; I may not even be so well off, but you promised."

Mrs. Block shook her head.

"I can't help that," she said. "If you don't like it you can—do the other thing. That's all there is to say about it. I'd rather be friends."

Mr. Billingham remained unmoved.

"I am not to be got rid of like that. I shall appeal to the Marquis himself," he threatened.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"The Marquis is a man of honour," Mr. Billingham explained. "I shall go to him. I shall tell him the truth. I shall say 'Mrs. Block was engaged to me. I introduced you as my friend. As a man of honour I require you to withdraw,' I know my friend," Mr. Billingham continued. "He will do as I desire. He will leave Monte Carlo the same day."

Mrs. Block was pale with anger. Her visitor's words carried conviction. The phrase "a man of honour" daunted her. In her fancy she could already see the Marquis seated with folded arms in his little voiture, with his portmanteau on the seat in front, on his way to the station.

"You must do nothing of the sort," she insisted.

"What is to prevent me?" he retorted. "Besides——"

"Besides what?" she interrupted eagerly.

Mr. Billingham was shamefaced but determined.

"I am poor," he confessed. "I am tired of being poor. I have lost heavily at the tables."

Mrs. Block came up to the scratch at once.

"For how much money," she asked, "will you leave me and the Marquis alone?"

"Two thousand pounds," Mr. Billingham replied without hesitation.

She was a little staggered, but she was a woman of action. She wrote out a cheque and handed it to him. He shook his head.

"It would take weeks to get the money for that," he pointed out.

"They will cash it downstairs," she assured him.

"You get the money and bring it in mille notes," he insisted. "That's all I ask. You can marry the Marquis as soon as you like then."

She motioned him to a chair.

"Wait," she ordered.

In a quarter-of-an-hour she returned, slightly breathless, with a great pile of mille notes in her hand.

"They had to send to the Bank," she explained. "There's your money. Now you just leave me and the Marquis alone."

Mr. Billingham picked up his hat sadly.

"You may be choosing the better man, Annie," he said, "but this is a great disappointment to me."

Mrs. Block sneered a little. She was not really fond of parting with her money.

"You've got something to console yourself with," she snapped out. "Hurry off, please. I am expecting the Marquis at any moment."

Thereafter the Marquis played his part manfully for a week. At the end of that time he made an abrupt appearance as Mr. Billingham and Madelon were finishing their dinner in a secluded corner of the Sporting Club Restaurant. He had all the appearance of a man on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"My friend," he exclaimed, sinking into a chair which a waiter had brought from a neighbouring table, "order me a liqueur brandy. This must cease. I have reached the limit."

Mr. Billingham wisely ordered a double liqueur brandy hastly and forbore to question his friend.

"I have stood the amused ridicule of a crowd of strangers," the latter went on. "I have put up with the agony of being drenched with intolerable perfumes, of listening to that strident voice, of——"

"Cut it out!" Mr. Billingham interrupted. "What's the trouble?"

The Marquis looked around him wildly.

"The lady," he confided, "is becoming amorous. She has held my hand, she has pressed my feet, until the thing has become monotonous. Now she has, I fear—other designs upon me."

The creases around Mr. Billingham's eyes began to deepen, his mouth quivered, his efforts at self-control became useless. He joined in Madelon's ecstatic outburst of amusement. When he had recovered sufficiently to wipe his eyes, the Marquis had drunk his brandy and was looking thoughtfully at the bottle.

"We dined," the Marquis explained, "at the Hotel de Paris. She insisted—declared that it was too quiet here and that she wanted me alone. She wore white satin—not enough of it by yards. She wore jewelery which made the people blink when she

came into the room. She sat next to a p a r t y of your compatriots and she c a l l e d me 'M a r q u i s' at the top of her voice every few minutes. When at last I thought my hour of comparative release had arrived, she declared that she had a headache and would spend the evening in her sitting-room. She has ordered me to follow her. I am to return—to sit with her there alone! She has whispered in my ear that we are engaged."

Mr. Billingham made signs to the waiter, who filled the Marquis' glass.

"You've got to go through with it, Marquis," he declared.

"But what is to be the end?" the Marquis demanded, almost passionately. "People are beginning to smile when they see us together. Our engagement has even been announced in some of the papers. One day she will march me into a church or registry office and I shall emerge a married man. She is masterful — overwhelming! What is your plan? It is time to announce it."

Mr. Billingham reflected.

"There have been a few little pickings," he mused.

"It is true," the Marquis assented. "I have jewellery for the first time for many years; pearl studs like blobs, and sapphire sleeve links and waistcoat buttons which are admirable. These things are so much to the good, but I cannot go on collecting them. There is a certain definiteness," he added, "in the woman's intentions towards me this evening, which is horrible."

Madelon, wiping the tears from her eyes, leaned forward.

"There must be a rescue party," she suggested.

"I agree," Mr. Billingham assented. "In ten minutes your sufferings shall be at an end; temporarily, at any rate. I will find some excuse. We will break in upon you."

"With that promise and under those conditions," the Marquis said, "I will return . . . ."

The Marquis kept his word, and Mr. Billingham carried out his share of the bargain. In less than a quarter-of-an-hour he presented himself at the sitting-room of Mrs. Block's gorgeous suite. He was immediately aware of tragical happenings. The Marquis, looking a little dazed, was standing upon the hearthrug. Mrs. Block, grasping a telegraphic dispatch in her hand, was in a state almost of collapse upon the sofa. The newcomers looked from one to the other.

"I regret my inevitable intrusion," he began—"Monsieur le Duc, the Marquis' father, has telephoned from Nice."

Mrs. Block banged the end of the sofa with her fist.

"Damn you all—dukes and marquises and the lot of you!" she cried. "Tom will smash you when he comes, and he'll kill me. What a fool I've been!"

"Say, who is this 'Tom' any-

way?" Mr. Billingham demanded.

"My husband!" Mrs. Block declared dramatically.

"Her husband!" the Marquis murmured under his breath with a beatific smile.

Mrs. Block rose to her feet. She was, after all, a woman of force and determination.

"Look here, you two," she confessed, "this is the long and short of it. I'm no widow. My husband's hale and hearty, though he's sixty years old. I've been down here three years, and a lone woman doesn't get the show she ought to. She wants someone attached to her. I guess I lost my head a bit. I wanted a man along, and I chose the simplest way of getting one. Now it's got put in the papers about me and the Marquis, my old man's seen it, and he'll be here tomorrow morning at twelve-thirty. Years ago," she went on, with a livid little shadow of memory blanching her face, "he used to beat me. He'd think nothing of doing it again, and as to any man he's ever run up against—well, he's made short work of him. 'Fighting Tom,' they used to call him . . . .Don't stand there looking like nincompoops, both of you! What are you going to do?"

The Marquis duly interpreted a glance from Mr. Billingham.

"I shall consult with my friend," he said. "You have treated me very badly, madame."

"Following upon your treatment of me," Mr. Billingham added meaningly, "the situation becomes a grave one. With your permission, we will call upon you at half past ten tomorrow morning."

"Let's have it out now," the lady begged.

Mr. Billingham shook his head.

"At half past ten," he repeated. "Come along, Marquis!"

Mrs. Block had not the strength to argue. The two men took a dignified leave of her.

At half past ten on the following morning a very altered Mrs. Block received her two visitors. She was wearing a plainly made gown, her pudgy face was devoid of its artificial colour, her eyebrows appeared to have lost their shape, and nothing but a cascade of jewellery remained of her previous magnificence. She scarcely waited for them to sit down.

"Well?" she demanded eagerly.

Mr. Billingham coughed.

"The Marquis desires to know your wishes, madame," Mr. Billingham announced stiffly.

"What I want him to do is to clear out," the lady declared. "if Tom's seen that bit in the paper about the Marquis and me—which he must have done as he's never left England before in his life—he'll hunt this place until he's found him, and then there'll be trouble. I shall tell him that the whole thing is a bit of news-

paper stuff, that I don't know any Marquis, that I haven't any friends here at all."

"I gather that you desire the Marquis to leave Monte Carlo," Mr. Billingham observed.

"This morning," was the prompt assent. "I want him out of the way before Tom starts making enquiries."

"You will understand, I am sure," his friend continued, "that for a man fixed like the Marquis, with a whole heap of social engagements, this is some sacrifice."

"It is intolerable!" the Marquis interposed. "I shall lose my roulette, my rooms are taken for another month—I lose, also, more than I can express," he added, with a little bow.

"You can cut that out," was the blunt retort. "You may or you may not have been in earnest, but I'm not going to believe that you're going to break your heart. Will you or won't you go?"

"I prefer to r e m a i n," the Marquis announced coldly. "If your husband desires satisfaction I shall be at his service."

Mrs. Block laughed. It was not exactly a laugh of humour, but it was the first time her features had relaxed.

"Tom's idea of 'satisfaction' would be to knock you into a jelly," she confided—"and he'd do it, too."

"I await the arrival of monsieur," the Marquis repeated haughtily.

"Look here, madame," Mr. Billingham intervened, "I guess we're wasting time. The Marquis is like myself—a man of moderate means. After losing a small fortune, he's struck a vein of luck and he's winning every day at the t a b l e s here. His rooms are taken for another month and he'll have to pay for them. If you want him to quit for your convenience, you must talk business about it."

"O-ho!" the lady exclaimed. "So that's the game, is it? I'm beginning to wonder, whether the Marquis isn't another of your kidney."

The Marquis picked up his hat and coat.

"The interview is at an end," he declared. "I find the attitude of madame outrageous."

Mrs. Block sprang up and barred his exit.

"Don't be silly," she enjoined. "Your friend knows what he's talking about. How much do you want to clear out of Monte Carlo before half past twelve, not show yourself here for at least a week, and deny you ever set eyes on me if Tom finds you out?"

"My friend will arrange such a matter," the Marquis replied icily. "I have no head for figures myself. These moves are very expensive."

"The Marquis will leave by the t w e l v e o'clock train to Nice," Mr. Billingham promised, "for the sum of two thousand pounds."

Mrs. Block looked from one to the other of the two men. There were times when she was a very ugly woman, and this was one of them.

"I believe you two," she began, "are n o t h i n g more nor less—"

Mr. Billingham held out his hand with a warning gesture, and the woman, with an effort, held her tongue. The Marquis threw his card upon the table.

"Present this with my compliments to your husband, madame," he begged. "I shall remain in this afternoon."

The woman leaned over the table, tore up the card savagely, and threw the fragments into the fire. Then she crossed the room, unlocked a drawer and produced a thick wad of mille notes. She counted them out in piles of tens. At a hundred thousand she paused. Mr. Billingham shook his head.

"The exchange today," he reminded her dryly.

She flung down another four packets. The Marquis picked them up with well-assumed nonchalance. His fingers trembled a little, however, as he thrust the entire roll into his breast pocket.

"I've been a damned fool," the woman confessed, "and I suppose I've got to pay for it."

"Fools always pay," Mr. Billingham murmured, as he picked up his hat and cane. "We have the honour, madame!"

"The deep regret!" the Marquis echoed.

"Go to b l a z e s!" was the lady's valedictory remark.

Madelon and Mr. Billingham that night, being in a festive mood, dined at the Hotel de Paris. They were still considering the matter of *hors d'oeuvres* when a *maitre d'hotel* ushered in some late arrivals. Mr. Billingham glanced up casually, but his eyes remained transfixed. Madelon slightly turned her head. Mrs. Block, in one of her most gorgeous frocks, was sailing through the room. Behind her was a small, ill-made man of about five feet seven, with s a n d y hair, unpleasant complexion, b u s h y eyebrows, narrow, suspicious eyes, and a very acquisitive mouth. He was badly dressed and he had the clumsy presence and the assertive manners of a stranger to such places. The *maitre d'hotel*, who had been talking to Madelon, smiled.

"It is the h u s b a n d of the wealthy lady from L e e d s in England," he confided. "He arrived this morning."

"Fighting Tom!" Mr. Billingham gasped.

(Continued from other side)

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